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**THE IMPACT OF ELECTED MEMBER  
DEVELOPMENT ON LOCAL AUTHORITY  
PERFORMANCE:**

**How can effective elected member development be  
provided to enable performance improvement at  
Liverpool City Council?**

**LAURA ROBERTSON COLLINS**

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the University of  
Chester for the degree of Master of Business Administration

**CHESTER BUSINESS SCHOOL**

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# **The Impact of Elected Member Development on Local Authority Performance:**

**How can effective elected member development be provided to enable performance improvement at Liverpool City Council?**

## **ABSTRACT**

This dissertation aims to discover whether elected member development can lead to performance improvement in councils, and if so, how it can best be provided to do so at Liverpool City Council. Public funds are provided for elected member development on the assumption that this will assist performance by improving governance and leadership, but there is little conclusive evidence to show that this is the case. This dissertation shows there is a relationship between providing development for members and improved performance in councils, but cannot prove that the development causes the improved performance. However, the dissertation does identify particular elements within the provision of elected member development that are particularly linked to higher performance in local authorities.

Liverpool City Council has had a member development programme since 2000, but its overall performance is apparently deteriorating, with particular issues around governance and leadership having been the subject of recent criticism. Liverpool received only two stars in its most recent Comprehensive Performance Assessment, and its 'direction of travel' was assessed at only level two on a scale of four – 'improving adequately'. If elected member development is linked to improved performance, it is important then to discover how development can best be provided to councillors at Liverpool to ensure this.

Chapter 1 of the dissertation describes the changes in the councillor role and the consequent need for training and development to support elected members, who are part-time volunteers in their role as governors of local authorities.

In Chapter 2 the literature review examines the improvement agenda for local government, and in particular the need for improvement at Liverpool City Council caused by the apparent decline in performance since 2004. Additional pressures on Liverpool City Council, for example the bid to become a 'City-Region', are also examined. The literature review contains discussion on the performance management of organisations via managing the performance of the individuals in them, and on how elected members do not easily fit the traditional human resource development models used in employment situations. Finally, the chapter examines the development issues specific to elected members, including the adversarial environment caused by the democratic system and the role of the political parties in recruiting and selecting the members, which leads to complexity in appraisal and identifying development needs.

From this literature search three main issues emerge which require further investigation: first, whether elected member development can improve local authority performance; second, if so, how development can best be provided; and third, what special consideration is needed within the cross-party development provision for the political groups on the authorities?

Chapters 3 and 4 look at the primary research undertaken for this dissertation. Chapter 3 describes the methodology of the research, including how both inductive and deductive strategies are used, as well as different data collection methods, to answer the three parts of the research question. The chapter also looks at the limitations of the research, which is conducted with members of one political party only due to the researcher's professional role, and at the small sample size. Chapter 4 gives an overview of all the authorities in the survey, showing that these are varied in political control and type. The chapter presents the results of the survey of each identified element of local authority provision of cross-party elected member development, and the provision of each element of development within the political groups there. It also presents some of the data from the semi-structured interviews with members from Liverpool City Council where this is directly related to the survey.



In the analysis in Chapter 5 the results of the survey on corporate provision are cross-referenced with the performance scores of the local authorities to investigate whether there is a relationship between the provision of development and the performance of the authority. Here we see that the higher performing councils do have higher levels of elected member development provision, although it is not clear if the development is the cause of better performance or the result of it. This shows that some of the identified elements of provision are particularly linked to performance scores. The second part of the analysis examines the situation at Liverpool City Council by examining the results of the case study and member interviews, in the light of the information from this cross-referencing. This indicates what changes can be recommended for Liverpool's provision of corporate, cross-party development for all its members.

The dissertation suggests that such corporate development cannot of itself be sufficient, however, due to the nature of the political groups and the relationship of the political parties to the local authority. Thus the final part of the analysis examines issues specific to the political groups at the surveyed authorities and in Liverpool, in order to make recommendations for development and training within Liverpool's Opposition Group. In particular the need for training of potential candidates prior to selection and election is identified from the interview data, and the complexity of providing such training outside of the local authority is discussed.

Chapter 6 summarises the recommendations for the provision of corporate (cross-party) member development which emerge from the analysis in Chapter 5. It also suggests recommendations for action within individual political groups' development, including the possibility of a 'Liverpool Academy' for potential elected members. Chapter 6 also contains recommendations for further research in this field.

The dissertation shows that particular ways of providing elected member development can impact on performance, and that improvement in this provision at Liverpool City Council can be achieved requiring relatively little additional resources, but by more effective use of existing resources within the City Council and local government.

## **Acknowledgements**

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And with special thanks to the fellow members of my Learning Support Group at Liverpool City Council, both old and new, whose support, help and friendship has been and continues to be invaluable.

## **Declaration**

This work is original and has not been submitted previously for any academic purpose. All secondary sources are acknowledged.

Signed:

Date:

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# **1. Introduction: How Can Effective Elected Member Development be provided to enable Performance Improvement at Liverpool City Council?**

## **1.1 Elected Member Development and Local Authority Performance**

Local authorities are under continuing pressure to perform more efficiently and provide services more effectively whilst keeping costs down (ODPM, 2003; Audit Commission, 2005b). Since the election of the Labour Government in 1997, central government has pushed local government to provide services for local residents to higher standards, whilst strict controls on spending have been imposed. The introduction of 'Best Value' meant balancing service quality with keeping costs to local tax payers as low as possible.

The agenda to improve service performance has been combined with the modernisation of local governance within the authorities – there have been changes to the way decisions are made and to the roles of the elected member in councils. This has meant the need for elected members to carry out their tasks as governors in different ways; in particular there has been increased responsibility for the councillors who perform 'executive' functions within councils, as well as new roles in scrutiny and in neighbourhoods for all council members (Filkin, 2000; Stoker & Wilson, 2004). Yet the councillors charged with carrying out these roles are part-time volunteers, who often have other paid work in addition to their council role and who are paid an allowance, not a salary, for their time (Stoker & Wilson, 2004). There are few - if any - minimum qualifications for those taking on these roles (IDeA, 2004a & 2006).

Central government increasingly assesses the effectiveness of the governance of local authorities when measuring overall performance: in particular corporate assessment, including strategic and community leadership, other issues such as scrutiny and engagement with performance management are also important (Audit Commission, 2005b). The performance of elected members – the executive and the backbench - is thus critical to an authority's overall success. Increasingly, it is assumed that public funds will be spent on the development of elected members (ODPM, 2003; IDeA, 2006).

Despite having had a member development programme in place for its elected members since 2000 there are current issues with Liverpool City Council's governance and performance, however. A major improvement in performance between 1999 and 2003 – when Liverpool moved from being one of the worst performing councils in the country to one of the fastest improving - has now faltered and been reversed. In its 2005 Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA), Liverpool City Council was assessed as being only a 'two star' authority - with particular concerns around governance and strategic leadership being highlighted (LCC, 2005e). This assessment was made under the CPA's new 'Harder Test' (AC, 2005b), but would point to this being a lower score than in 2004. In 2004 Liverpool had been assessed as 'good' - the equivalent of three stars in the new test and Liverpool City Council's vision in 2004 had been that it aimed to become an 'excellent' authority in 2005 – which would have meant achieving four stars in the latest assessment.

Furthermore, recent concerns over governance issues have led to the decision by central government that Liverpool is not yet able to move towards becoming a 'city-region' whilst other major cities (Manchester, Birmingham) may be able to do so (Marshall & Finch, 2006). 'City-region' status could mean cities having greater freedom in how they spend their funding and their moving towards control of services currently administered by local and regional quangos, such as those under the Regional Development Agencies and the Learning and Skills Councils (Marshall & Finch, 2006). Other proposed changes, including further devolution to neighbourhood level, will also require an increase in elected member capacity if they are to successfully deliver improved local services accountable to local residents (Miliband, 2006).

## **1.2 The Aims of the Dissertation**

This dissertation aims to examine whether effective development of elected members can contribute to improved local authority performance. Local authorities and local government organisations such as the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) provide training and development opportunities for members to enable them to have optimum input into the governance of their councils: a considerable amount of public

funding has been invested in this (LCC, 2000a & 2005b; MJ, 2004; IDeA, 2006). There is evidence that special consideration needs to be given to the provision of elected member development in view of the adversarial party political environment of a local authority, however, where members of the governing body are openly competing with one another for the support of the electorate (Goss, 2001; Clarke & Stewart, 1996).

This dissertation will examine the provision of elected member development in other local authorities around the UK and whether those with more development of their members perform better overall. It will look at how elected members can be provided with opportunities for learning in order to perform effectively as elected representatives, including what it is that the current members of Liverpool City Council would like provided to assist them to better perform their roles in the council. Finally it will look at the particular effect of the political groups within the council, including how the adversarial party political system affects the development opportunities that can be provided for elected members (Goss, 2001).

The dissertation will suggest that whilst there is evidence that higher performing local authorities put more resources into developing their members, there is a lack of evidence that it is the result of development of its members that has led to improved performance. There is not, however, any evidence of a negative effect on performance. Suggestions for the provision of elected member development at Liverpool City Council – in order to best use limited public resources - are made from the results of the research, including the importance of giving consideration to the needs of the political groups within this. The dissertation thus seeks to examine three main areas within the issue of elected member development:-

- i. Whether there is a link between providing elected member development and improved local authority performance;
- ii. How elected member development can best be provided in order to maximize any opportunity for local authority improvement; and
- iii. What consideration may need to be given to the political groups within the provision of such development?

### **1.3 The Need for Research in Elected Member Development**

There is little existing research on the effectiveness of elected member development, although it is an area funded at both local and national levels to help improve local authority performance (ODPM, 2003; IDeA, 2005d; LCC, 2005b). Local authorities are large organizations often employing many thousands of people to provide services for the local population. All local residents rely on local authority services, and elected members bring democratic accountability to the provision of these. In particular local authorities provide services for more vulnerable members of the community – for the elderly and children at risk – but all residents are reliant on their local council for basic environmental and community safety services.

The ability of elected members to perform their roles as governors and as representatives can have a major effect on service provision across large populations. Liverpool City Council has an annual budget of over a billion pounds and is a direct employer of 19,000 people, providing services for over 400,000 residents as well as managing a city that supports employment and services across a much larger region. Yet councillors are expected to perform their roles on a part-time, largely voluntary basis with little mandatory training. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, responsible for local government, has recognized that building capacity within local authorities and especially within their governance systems is critical for improving local authority performance and is thus a key factor in improving many local public services (ODPM, 2003).

Traditional models of development used in employment scenarios are not necessarily appropriate for elected members, however, because of the adversarial environment of the local authority and due to the role of the political parties and electorate in the recruitment and selection of members. How best to provide development opportunities for elected members with regard to the issues of political party, democratic accountability and governance role is one that confronts the local authority as a whole, the elected members who experience it and the wider community. How best to support the members who are taking on these roles is currently a critical matter if Liverpool City Council is to improve its performance and provide leadership and improved services for the city.

## **1.4 The Methodology of the Research**

This research utilises a literature search to examine the main themes around the issue of providing development in local authorities for improving performance. This includes an examination of the literature on developing individuals in order to manage the performance of organisations and literature on the specific need for the improvement of local government, including on forthcoming proposals for councils such as ‘city-regions’ and the ‘double-devolution’ of decision-making power to neighbourhood levels. In particular, the literature review looks at what makes local authorities different from other types of organisation, including the effect of the democratic system of election of councillors and the role of the political parties within this, and how these impact on the way development of elected members can be provided.

Primary research is undertaken to examine some of the elements which are not fully answered by the current literature: it aims to discover if there is any positive link between developing members and performance of the local authorities, as well as ways that development can best be delivered to enable maximum benefit to the organisation to be gained from this. The primary research uses two methods - a questionnaire sent to a sample of 65 local authorities and a series of semi-structured interviews with elected members in Liverpool City Council in order to gain information.

Some parts of the primary research require different research approaches to others: when seeking to examine the link between the provision of elected member development and the performance of other local authorities the research makes use of techniques with a bias to deduction, or testing theory. However, whilst investigating how development can best be provided for members the research uses techniques with a bias to induction (building theory approach): here it seeks data to provide theory. The building theory approach is used to determine how development can best be provided for members and what considerations may need to be made for the political groups within this.

Overall the approach is ‘interpretivist’ – generating data and reflecting on the theoretical themes suggested by the data. In particular, this approach is considered more appropriate

when the “researcher is part of the research process” (Saunders et al, 2003). The research strategy is exploratory in that it aims to find out what is happening – it seeks “new insights; to ask questions and to assess phenomena in a new light” (Saunders et al, 2003). Much of the research is qualitative, taking small samples and using these for in-depth analysis. There are several limitations to this research: these include the small size of the sample of local authorities used for the questionnaire – which is not statistically significant; and the need to restrict the interviews with elected members at Liverpool City Council to those in the one political group due to the researcher’s professional role.

## **1.5 Outline of the Dissertation**

The dissertation is in five sections following this introductory section. As described above, the literature review looks at existing published work on using development to manage organisational performance, including how existing models of human resource learning and development do not always fit the position of elected members due to the ‘special nature’ of local government and the adversarial environment engendered by the democratic system. The literature includes government reports and proposed White Papers on the need for improvement of local government in England and at Liverpool City Council in particular, including looking at further demands which may be made on elected members of the council in the near future.

Chapter 3 explains the methodology of the research in detail. As mentioned above, use is made of a questionnaire sent to contacts in 65 local authorities which produced 43 substantive responses, that is, 66.2% of those contacted. These responses provide data on the provision of elected member development in other authorities and allow comparison to be made with the authorities’ performance scores. The questionnaire information is supplemented with a case study of Liverpool, including semi-structured interviews with members of Liverpool City Council. Here issues of the development opportunities that members would like provided are explored, including whether members believe this could help their performance, as well as which elements they believe must be dealt with within their own groups due to the adversarial nature of the local authority environment.

The results of the primary research from the survey of other local authorities and much of the interview information are presented in Chapter 4. This includes an overview of all the other local authorities surveyed, and the results of the questionnaires on the resources invested in elected member development and the way the development is provided in each authority. The results include details on what specific provision is made for the individual political groups in the other local authorities, and the members' comments on these issues in Liverpool City Council.

Chapter 5 analyses the results of the primary research. First, the research results are cross-referenced with the authorities' Comprehensive Performance Assessment scores. The results of the cross-referencing show that there is a relationship between the provision of elected member development and better local authority performance but there is little conclusive evidence to show that the member development is the cause of better performance: there is no evidence that elected member development has any inverse effect on performance, however. Subsequently, ways in which to provide the most effective development opportunities are analysed, including consideration of how to accommodate the needs of political groups in this if cross-party development is not of itself sufficient, and the need for training prior to election. This chapter includes the addition of case study information to allow the situation at Liverpool City Council to be examined in detail in the light of the survey information and cross-referenced data.

In Chapter 6 recommendations are made: these include recommendations for provision of development for all members at Liverpool City Council, as well as for the Opposition Group where cross-party development may not be appropriate. The Chapter also contains recommendations for future research in order to gain further insight to the subject.

## **1.6 Definition of Terms**

Major terms used in this dissertation are defined as follows:-

**i) Elected Members, or Councillors, or Council Members** – these terms are used interchangeably to mean the elected representatives on the local authority, or council. In

Liverpool City Council there are currently 90 elected members, representing 30 electoral wards across the city. One-third of the membership is elected each year (with one year in four 'fallow') - thus bringing new members onto the council nearly every year.

**ii) Development** – this is used here to refer to all learning and training experiences, informal and formal. Buckley et al give a definition of development as “the general enhancement and growth of an individual’s skills and abilities through conscious and unconscious learning” (Buckley et al, 2004). **Elected Member Development** - is a term widely used in local government referring to all learning experiences provided for councillors. The abbreviation **EMD** is also used in this dissertation for Elected Member Development.

**iii) Political Groups** – these are the groups that members operate in within the council organisation – these are essentially the same as the political parties of the members, but the groups have a formal identity within the council which was enshrined in the 1988 Local Government Act. The numbers in each group define the amount of representation each group has within the council and so this is critical to the decision-making process.

**iv) Political Group Support Service** – this is the support service that the members of the political groups receive. In Liverpool City Council each group has a dedicated support service with a small staff team to provide research, administrative services and other resources including ICT facilities for the members of each of the groups to use.

**v) Local Authority, or Council** – used interchangeably, this is the provider of local government services for the particular area. In this dissertation this can include city councils, metropolitan borough councils and county councils, but it does not include parish councils or other very small administrative units.

**vi) Administration** – this is the ruling group - the group that forms the Executive on the local authority – in Liverpool this is currently the Liberal Democrat Group. Conversely the **Opposition** is the largest group on the council that does not hold power – the Labour



Group forms the current opposition in Liverpool. Additionally there may also be one or more **minority groups** on a council. Some councils have cross-party administrations where members of different political groups are represented on the executive board. Others have elected mayors, where the mayor takes on the executive function in their individual capacity.

## **1.7 Summary: The Dissertation**

This chapter has introduced the research question that will be examined in this dissertation and has explained why this is of importance and requires research. It has explained that the drive to improve the provision of local services has led to changes in governance and in the role of councillors - leading to more demands being placed on elected members. The impetus from central government via local government organisations such as the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) is that councillors be provided with increased development opportunities to assist them in their governance roles; this requires that public money be found for this – and thus that public value be assured.

This introduction has explained that the dissertation will examine three main elements of the research question: first, whether the provision of development opportunities improves the performance of local authorities; second, if it does, how elected member development can be most effectively and efficiently provided to enable councillors to have maximum input to their council; and third, how the adversarial environment of local government affects the provision of learning and development for members, including what special consideration may need to be given to the development of the members within their political groups, as well as to the development of the groups themselves.

As described above, the dissertation aims to add to current knowledge on the issue of elected member development and the performance of local authorities by undertaking primary research in this field. First the dissertation will proceed with an examination of some of the existing literature on the relevant areas.

## **2. Literature Review: Local Authority Performance, Organisational Improvement and Individual Learning Needs**

### **2.1 Introduction**

Local authorities throughout the UK face continuing demands to improve service delivery and in addition there may be more changes in local governance forthcoming – including increased devolution of decision-making to neighbourhood level and the move to give more powers to ‘city-regions’ – requiring further improved performance (Lyons, 2006, ODPM, 2006). Development of elected members is now considered a pre-requisite for the improvement of local authorities and thus public funding is provided for this (LCC, 2000; IDeA, 2004a; Audit Commission, 2005b). Central government places emphasis on the need to improve the capacity of elected members and funds councillor development via local authorities and other organizations (ODPM, 2003; IDeA, 2006).

Liverpool City Council faces specific pressure to improve: the authority’s overall performance was assessed as apparently deteriorating between 2004 and 2005; a bid is being made for Liverpool to become a ‘city-region’; and there is the responsibility of preparing to be the European Capital of Culture in 2008 - all placing more demands on the elected members as the organisation’s governing body (LCC, 2005e). Liverpool City Council has had an elected member development programme in place since 2000 but has encountered recent problems in delivering this (LCC, 2005b): this may reflect issues around providing development for councillors which is affected by the party political and adversarial environment of a local authority (Wheeler, 2005a; Goss, 2001).

The literature review below examines some of these issues in three parts: first, it looks at the agenda for local government improvement and why development of elected members is a critical part of this; second, how the development of individuals is used to manage performance in organisations and how the ‘special nature’ of local government creates problems in managing the performance of councillors; and third, it examines ways that learning and development can be provided for elected members and specific problems with this including those encountered by the members at Liverpool City Council.

## **2.2 The Improvement Agenda for Local Government**

### **2.2.1 The Modernisation of Local Governance Arrangements**

The Labour Government acted to strengthen local government when it came to power in 1997 (Leach, 2000; Atkinson & Wilks-Heeg, 2000). Discussing the White Paper “*Modern Local Government: in touch with the people*” in 2000 Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott said modern local government “is a vital part of the fabric of the dynamic, democratic, fair and inclusive society people want to see. It is crucial to the provision of top quality local services and securing the quality of life that people deserve and have a right to respect” (Filkin *et al*, 2000).

The Local Government Act 2000 sought to empower councils to act and to fulfill their new ‘duty of well-being’ – the obligation to act where possible to improve residents’ lives - by speeding up decision-making and stream-lining the governance arrangements (Filkin, *et al* 2000; Stoker & Wilson, 2004). The act required all local authorities in England and Wales to move to one of three forms of executive governance – either with a mayor and cabinet, a leader and cabinet or a mayor and council manager (Stoker & Wilson, 2004). The emphasis on executive governance in the 2000 Act was to counter perceived problems engendered since 1989 where the legislative changes had not strengthened democracy in terms of strengthening the capacity of the majority party to govern effectively (Leach *et al*, 1994). Above all it was designed to strengthen strategic leadership and create clear accountability for decisions (Leach *et al*, 2005).

The move from the nineteenth-century ‘committee system’ to executive governance was designed to enable the executive to concentrate on strategic policy issues, whilst all operational issues were the responsibility of officers under delegated powers. Executive governance meant local government became closer to the central government model, with councillors becoming either executive or non-executive ‘backbench’ members. The executive, the scrutiny function and the area arrangements together made up the three parts of the modernized governance system: this meant new roles and ways of working for all elected members on the local authority (Leach, 2000; Stoker & Wilson, 2004).

### **2.2.2 Improving Performance in Local Authorities**

Along with changes to governance arrangements, new means of measuring local government performance across service areas were introduced in order to try to achieve improvement in service delivery, including the introduction of 'Best Value' in the Local Government Act 2000 (ODPM, 1999). A performance management framework of best value indicators was adopted in 1999. This subsequently moved from its focus on measurement to an assessment of performance management capacity, with the launch in 2002 of the "Comprehensive Performance Assessment" (CPA) conducted by the Audit Commission. This measured authorities' overall provision and categorized them as 'poor', 'weak', 'fair', 'good' or 'excellent': this assessment created 'league tables' of the best and worst performing councils.

In 2005 the Comprehensive Performance Assessment moved to a "harder test" for the 150 'upper tier' councils (Audit Commission, 2005). Chief Executive of Audit Commission Steve Bundred said "The CPA has been a highly effective tool for improvement, but it needs to change as expectations on councils change" (Burton, 2005). The criteria measured still included annual service assessment, use of resources and a periodic corporate assessment. However, the determining of the service assessment scores have changed so that there are now 'level one' services (children and young people and adult social care) and 'level two' services – housing, environment, culture, welfare benefits and fire authority (AC, 2005).

Further, in 2005 the rating categories were also changed to 'star' ratings – from the worst performing authority having zero stars to the best performer having four stars. The categories were renamed to signify that this is a different test but also because of local authorities' concern about the new 'harder test' - thus removing some of the original transparency in the system. Within the new CPA score there is an additional 'direction of travel' categorisation - indicating how well an authority is improving as well as its current level. The Audit Commission states that 70% of councils are assessed as improving 'strongly' or 'well' which it claims shows that the CPA "has helped drive improvement in councils" (AC, 2005).

### **2.2.3 Problems with Performance at Liverpool City Council**

Between 1999 – which saw the Government’s ‘Modernising Government’ White Paper as well as the City Council’s first IDeA ‘peer review’ - and 2003, Liverpool became one of the fastest improving authorities in the country. These two initiatives had the combined effect of repositioning the city council from having the second worst services in the UK as well as the highest Council Tax, to an authority assessed as ‘good’ in its 2003 CPA – the fourth highest level in a five-level assessment (AC, 2002). The Council’s stated aim in 2004 was to move to become an ‘excellent’ authority, the top category. However there was some disappointment when the 2004 assessment was the same level as that in 2003.

The lack of progress made between 2003 and 2004 was emphasised in 2005 when Liverpool was assessed as being only a ‘two-star’ authority in its Comprehensive Performance Assessment. This is a lower score than in 2004, although it was under the ‘Harder Test’ - two stars being only the third level on a five-level assessment (AC; 2005b; LCC, 2005e). This cannot be dismissed on grounds of social deprivation - other core cities scored higher than Liverpool: both Sheffield and Leeds were assessed as ‘four-star’ authorities, for example (AC, 2005). An additional concern was that the corporate assessment element in the 2005 CPA was carried forward from the score in 2002 and “the next corporate assessment will be far more testing, requiring clear evidence of achievement against national shared priorities” (LCC, 2005e). The council must “adequately discharge its community leadership role and work with partners to jointly own ‘outcome’ targets” which involves ensuring partners are accountable for delivery through robust performance management (LCC, 2005e).

In addition, a drop of just one level in the ‘Use of Resources’ category – currently assessed at ‘level 2’, would cause Liverpool to fall to a ‘one-star’ authority overall. Current problems in this area include the lack of “required procedures in place to evidence that our decision making is adequately informed by a value for money perspective” and the need for Liverpool to “better evidence the alignment of financial resources with priorities”; an almost total absence of both medium and long-term financial planning have also been highlighted (LCC, 2005e).

#### **2.2.4 Problems with Elected Member Capacity**

The report by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister into local government - “Capacity Building in Local Government - Research on Capacity-building Needs”, 2003 – specifically drew attention to the need to develop elected members as a part of building the capacity of all local authorities. The report had identified gaps in the capacity of the local government sector: these gaps included the areas of partnership working, of e-government, of risk-taking and of community engagement. However, in addition to these skill gaps the ODPM report specifically identified “a shortage of strategic management skills and ineffective overview and scrutiny” among elected members (ODPM, 2003).

It was found that the move to executive governance had in fact caused some of the problems identified with councillor ability, for example, the ODPM report explained that many authorities found the capacity of the backbench “suffered from the practice of extracting the most talented members for the cabinet”. This issue has clearly caused problems in Liverpool: in 2005 the ruling Liberal Democrat group attempted to amend the Council’s constitution to allow ‘assistant executive members’ to sit on scrutiny committees (LCC, 2005c). Having extended the Executive to include 22 members in 2002 – with 11 assistant executive members as well as 11 executive members - the administration group, despite having 60 members at that time, was finding it lacked sufficient capacity to serve effectively on select committees. This move came despite the specific intention of executive governance to separate executive functions from scrutiny, although the attempt was dropped due to political opposition.

Further capacity issues have also been highlighted at Liverpool recently. In October 2005 an Audit Commission report into the ‘Scheme of Delegation to Officers’ – a vital component of the constitution authorising the member / officer split in decision-making - was commissioned by Liverpool City Council’s ‘Governance Review Group’. This report pointed to a lack of strategic level working by the Council’s Executive Board collectively and as individual members, and pointed to unsustainable levels of involvement in detailed policy by the executive members instead.

### **2.2.5 Future Challenges for Elected Members: ‘Double Devolution’**

Many non-executive councillors have struggled with their new roles in post-2000 local government, feeling that they have lost power and influence (Stoker & Wilson, 2004; Taylor & Wheeler, 2001). The move to executive governance meant a radical reforming of the roles of individual councillors, with non-executive members in both the ruling and opposition groups being expected to be scrutineers of policy formed by the executive, and to become ‘community champions’ (Leach, 2001). The ‘community champion’ aspect of the backbench role is emphasized in the neighbourhood devolution proposed in the current White Paper on governance and in the Lyons report (Lyons, 2006).

David Miliband, then Minister for Communities, said in his speech to the New Local Government Network in January 2006 that “since 1997 a clearer focus on transparent standards, clear targets, and intervention to correct underperformance has helped to raise standards in public services” and that the government is now seeking to make further changes to the way local authorities deliver services to the communities that they serve (Miliband, 2006). The current White Paper proposes a move to increased governance at neighbourhood level, modelled on the French Communes, which are far smaller than electoral wards in England (Jones 1997; Miliband, 2006). This would be a ‘double deal for devolution’ in that “local government can have more power if it in turn also hands more power to local people and neighbourhoods” (Wintour, 2005). This change is not intended to be a new administrative tier but there would mean “proposals for delegated budgets, new powers for parishes” (Wintour, 2005). This approach is claimed to be “based on empowering people so they can shape the services they receive” (Miliband).

These changes will mean further challenges for elected members as within the proposal Miliband sees a “more visible and powerful role for ward councillors” - as ‘the influential councillor’ - “given their democratic mandate, they are well-placed to act as mediators, filters and advocates for their local communities”. Miliband sees ward councillors speaking and acting for their communities and holding authorities to account; being accessible to the whole of their electorate, listening to and representing the views of other

community advocates; and fostering good working relationships between service providers and communities.

#### **2.2.6 Further Challenges for Liverpool – Bidding for ‘City-Region’ Status**

As part of the reinvigoration of local governance the government’s “State of the Cities” paper published in March 2006 highlights the possibility of cities moving towards ‘City-Region’ status. This would give cities enhanced spending power across a wider geographical area than their traditional local authority boundaries and is intended to enlarge the role of cities and empower them along the lines of cities in other European countries (Marshall & Finch, 2006).

‘City-Regions’ would have powers to run services currently under regional quangos – such as the Learning and Skills Councils and Regional Development Agencies – and would bring these back into the direct accountability of the local democratic system. Increased freedom over spending with local tax-raising powers is intended to increase local options over transport and other services which may need decision-making at sub-regional level, rather than at local authority level. Whether or not elected mayors are essential to this is still under discussion: elected mayors are favoured by the government, however, in order to bring the clear leadership that was envisaged in the change to executive government in the modernisation agenda (Leach *et al*, 2005).

Liverpool City Council is currently bidding for ‘city-region’ status and hopes to be given permission to proceed in June 2006 (LCC, 2006c). Liverpool was not considered in the first tranche, however, as Manchester and Birmingham were, due to concerns with governance in the city (Marshall & Finch, 2006). The report for the ODPM highlighted concern – in particular from local businesses who would face paying increased business rates – that the city’s rulers could not be trusted with more powers, particularly in view of the public ‘falling-out’ between the political and officer leadership at the Liverpool City Council last year. There were concerns over the process and cost of the resignation of Council Leader Mike Storey in November 2005, and the consequent departure of the Chief Executive in March 2006. Concerns were also expressed about governance in terms



of the influence of the 'Militant Tendency' within the Labour Party in Liverpool, although it is 20 years since members of this group held power in the city (Marshall & Finch, 2006).

The centrality of the relationship between the chief executive and the political leader in all local authorities is being increasingly recognized. Swann (2005) comments in the Local Government Association's magazine that:

*"All the evidence, anecdotal and otherwise, from comprehensive performance assessment and other sources has been that the relationship between the political and managerial leadership of a council is critical....If the relationship is a dysfunctional one, the council has little or no chance of performing well" (Swann, 2005).*

This reflects Carver who refers to all public bodies in *Boards that make a Difference* when he claims that "no single relationship in the organization is as important as that between the board and its CEO" (Carver, 1997). The 'Vibrant Local Leadership' paper by ODPM (2005) deals with the leadership of political leaders and that of managerial leaders – yet there is little on the inter-relationship between the two, however (Carroll, 2005; Swann, 2005).

Carroll points out that there is an additional problem for Liverpool City Council's leadership in that whilst council chief executives constitutionally work for their council they must now spend more of their time working to central government's agenda. This "creates huge tensions, especially if there are political differences between the two" (2005). Silvester points to the need to develop members in cabinets work better together by attending the 'cabinet development centres' run by the "Leadership Centre for Local Government":

*"The development of our political leaders, on whom so much of the success of local government depends, has come woefully low on the list ways to improve councils' performance" (Silvester, 2006).*

### 2.2.7 The Need for Elected Member Development in Local Authorities

One of the biggest barriers to building capacity in local authorities identified by the government was “a culture of resistance to change, particularly among members” (ODPM, 2003). The ODPM report into local government capacity highlighted the need for development in order to build capacity and that in particular that:

*“The range of methods used to build the capacity of members is not as broad as those for officers, and considerably less time and money is generally devoted to building members’ capacity” (ODPM, 2003).*

The same problems had been identified before: Martin (1997) states that it is:

*“Almost 20 years since Eddison et al (1978) recommended that the councillor should be given ‘the necessary support to allow him to comprehend what is going on around him and to develop his abilities in coping with his role’ (Martin, 1997).*

With the new governance arrangements there has been growing pressure on authorities for an expansion in member development work and general support to members (Palmer, 2005; IDeA, 2004c & 2005c). The Improvement and Development Agency was established in 1999 as an independent non-party body created ‘by local government for local government’ to lead the way in sharing knowledge, best practice and member development. The Chair, Colin Barrow, says that “supporting elected members is key to helping all local authorities raise their ambitions and the quality of services they deliver to their communities”. Barrow points to the breadth of roles councillors undertake - “community leader, strategic thinker, advocate, ambassador, scrutineer, and more” - and thus says “it is easy to see why many have found settling into their position a daunting task” (IDeA, 2004).

In conclusion, the performance of elected members has then been identified as a critical success factor for the performance of local government. Further, increased development of councillors has been identified as being critical to their performance and is being funded with public money. *What evidence is there then – if any - that elected member development can lead to improved local authority performance?*

## 2.3 Managing the Performance of Organisations

### 2.3.1 The 'Crucial Role' of Recruitment and Selection

Much human resource and employee development literature indicates that the way to improve the performance of organisations lies in improving the performance of the individuals in them (Bach & Sissons, 2000). Individual performance has been defined as a function of ability, motivation and opportunity to succeed (access to resources) – and ability in particular varies widely between individuals as it is influenced by intelligence, education and life experience (Boxall & Purcell, 2003). Performance of individuals within organisations can be managed to an extent in terms of both 'buy' (recruitment) and 'make' (development) - but human resource development theory puts much emphasis on the 'crucial role' of recruitment and selection in managing performance as 'make' cannot replace 'buy':

*"Given the fact of major ability differences in the population, training in companies should be seen as a complement to, rather than a substitute for, careful recruitment" (Boxall & Purcell, 2003).*

The increasing use of psychometric testing as a recruitment tool by the top FTSE companies indicates the importance placed on ability for job performance - 80% of the FTSE top 100 firms now use some form of ability test as part of recruitment and this figure is rising (Jha, 2006). Research on the critical role of ability in explaining performance suggests recruitment industry practitioners are "not wrong" to act as if recruitment and selection is the most important human resource function as:

*"Failure to recruit workers with appropriate competence will doom the firm to failure or, at the very least, to stunted growth" (Boxall and Purcell, 2003).*

Further, while firms should aim to recruit effectively at all levels of ability, the need to recruit astutely is particularly important where higher levels of discretion or specialized blends of skills are required in the work because "as job complexity increases, so does the range of human performance" (Boxall & Purcell, 2003).

### 2.3.2 The Role of Political Parties in Selection and Recruitment

The importance of recruitment and selection in managing performance has serious implications for local authorities in relation to developing their elected members as councils have no input or control over the recruitment and selection process of their elected members - who are chosen by political parties and elected via the democratic system (Leach *et al*, 1994; Clarke & Stewart, 1996). The 'special nature' of local government – where “there is a tension between a local authority as an organisation for effective service delivery, and the local authority as a political institution constituted for debate and challenge” (Leach *et al*, 1994) means the involvement of political parties in the organisation. This democratic accountability makes local authorities unusual organisations – the ‘distinctiveness’ of local government described by Clarke and Stewart (1996). Leach *et al* say that elections on party political lines:

*“Bring on to the governing body of the authority councillors who are not selected to meet internal organisational criteria, but are chosen by the parties and elected by the citizenry” (Leach et al, 1994).*

Clarke & Stewart (1996) point out that the political parties dominate the provision of candidates for election – thus “like it or not party machines are key gatekeepers to council membership”. Further, the ‘First Past the Post’ system in UK elections can mean in some electoral wards that the internal party process for selection can be “more significant than the election itself” (Clarke & Stewart, 1996). 95% of all elected members in councils in England are representatives of one of the three main political parties yet this is rarely acknowledged – and this lack of acknowledgement can lead to a lack of openness in debate within local authorities (Wheeler, 2005a). Wheeler attributes this to an “understandable nervousness about politics and politicians” which leads to agencies involved in local government improvement talking about:

*“Community leadership, civic leadership – anything but political parties. It is as if there is a huge elephant in the room and everyone is trying to ignore it” (Wheeler, 2005a).*

The statutory basis for councillors being organized into party political groups goes back only to the 1989 Local Government and Housing Act but in practice the party 'caucus' goes back to the nineteenth century (Clarke and Stewart, 1996). Political parties dominate the management of most local authorities, having "enormous impact but with little discussion of the way they work" (Clarke and Stewart, 1996). Goss (2001) says that "the *real centre of political decision making at the local level has been for many years the political group*", and that the group's links with the political party mean decisions are often influenced by the party. Further, that the political culture of a group is very powerful, and the "members' room is at the heart of council life" (Goss, 2001). Stoker and Wilson (2004) claim that local government legitimacy can be called into question when decisions are made on party lines due to the lack of formal democracy involved.

### **2.3.3 The Effects of Political Party Involvement**

Paul Wheeler, of the Political Skills Forum, says that political parties at local level bring many useful benefits to local government: "An internal coherence and discipline, a clear set of policies and a ladder of opportunity for those without money or influence to come into local politics" (Wheeler, 2005a). However, the political parties are losing the battle to recruit a new generation of local activists which is having an impact on performance.

Similarly, Cllr Mike Storey, then Leader of Liverpool City Council, said at the Local Government Association Conference in 2005 that the quality of councillors needs to be addressed: "sadly, the quality of people who want to get involved is declining", blaming the move to executive forms of governance and perceived loss of influence of the backbencher for this decline (Storey, 2005). The study by Ashworth *et al* for the 'Association for Public Excellence' in 2003 also found it "was becoming increasingly difficult to attract new people to stand as elected members" (Ashworth *et al* 2003). Wheeler and Taylor (2001) go further - with council functions increasingly being the responsibility of the council's executive or of government appointees:

*“The surprise is not that political parties are finding it increasingly hard to find people to stand in local elections but that anyone of sound mind is willing to put their name forward” (Taylor & Wheeler, 2001).*

Despite their control of councillor recruitment and selection, the political parties have a limited role in managing the development of their councillors once elected, however – and in particular the lack of talented volunteers to stand as candidates for the political parties removes much of the possible sanction for lack of performance (Stoker & Wilson, 2004; Wheeler, 2006). Further, Wheeler points to the almost total lack of resources spent on advertising the role of councillor - by political parties or by local authorities - compared to recruitment for senior officer posts, for example, which would engender expensive advertising (Wheeler, 2006).

Another effect of the parties’ domination of the recruitment and selection of candidates for election to councils is that a lack of diversity within the political parties inevitably leads to a lack of diversity amongst councillors – this has been identified as a major issue by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister in its report on capacity-building in 2003. Thus elected members across the UK continue to be overwhelmingly white, male and middle-aged (ODPM, 2003; IDeA, 2004b). Burton (2005) points out that “the gender gap is going to take 48 years to close”. In Liverpool – a city with over 8% black and ethnic minority population, there is currently only one black councillor out of 90, and only 32 women councillors – the proportion having slightly increased to just over a third of the council members – up from 29 since the elections in May 2006 (LCC, 2006d).

Some political parties are taking action on recruiting and selecting electoral candidates from more diverse backgrounds and on ‘attracting members of talent’ (Wheeler, 2006). The Labour Party’s system of all-women short-lists may now be adopted by the Conservative Party, and the Labour Party is setting up ‘academies’ in some areas to provide training for those members who are interested in standing as candidates (Bristol Labour Party, 2006; Lancashire Labour Party; 2006). Other projects such as “Operation Black Vote’ are having an impact in some areas. This provides opportunities for young

people from black and ethnic minority communities to shadow councillors from all parties in order to “demystify the councillor role” and “open up the process to allow greater diversity and representation of local interests and concerns”: at least one person has since applied to stand as a candidate in Bristol from this project (Holland, 2006).

#### **2.3.4 Managing and Appraising Individual Performance in Organisations**

Harrison defines developing people as part of an overall human resource strategy as being “the skilful provision and organisation of learning experiences, primarily but not exclusively in the workplace, in order that business goals and organisational growth can be achieved” (Stewart, 1999). Performance management systems mean that the development of individuals must be aligned with the organisations’ vision and longer term goals in order that, through enhancing the skills, knowledge, learning and innovative capability of people at every level, “the organisation as well as the individual can prosper” (Harrison, 2005). According to Harrison the aim of performance management is twofold:

*“to enable, support and reward all organisational members in achieving good performance, and to retain and develop able and committed people who will help the organisation to achieve its longer-term goals” (Harrison, 2005).*

Performance management systems are distinguished by an “emphasis on linking corporate to individual objectives” (Bach & Sisson, 2000). The number of organisations using formal performance management systems rose from 20% in 1992 to 69% in 1998 according to CIPD (Bach & Sisson, 2000). By 2004 this had risen again to 87% of respondents in the CIPD survey, of which 71% agreed that the focus of performance management is developmental (CIPD, 2005). Liverpool City Council’s Personal Performance Review system is described to staff as being a yearly way of reviewing past performance and developing future performance to align individual goals with organisational ones to “ensure that the service keeps on improving” as defined in the council’s mission statement (LCC 2004a).

As appraisal has become incorporated into performance management systems in a wider range of organisations it has changed in character, with less emphasis on pay reward, and more on the development of staff (Bach & Sisson, 2000; Boxall & Purcell, 2003). The 2005 CIPD survey on learning and development shows that of the organisations with a performance management system, 65% utilised an individual annual appraisal, with 62% featuring objective-setting and review. Some researchers have pointed to a lack of connection between appraisal and learning needs analysis:

*“There appears to be a large number of inconsistencies and unanswered questions in the literature concerned with performance appraisal as a needs analysis technique” (F & R Bee, 2003).*

This could be due to the potential conflict identified in the different purposes of the review process, in particular that between the use of appraisal to assess for reward – which encourages an attempt to minimize any weaknesses – and the analysis of learning needs, which requires frank discussion (Bee *et al*, 2003). The lack of training for managers to identify learning needs in staff, and the lack of recognition for performing this managerial role add to this problem (James, 2005).

### **2.3.5 Problems with Managing the Performance of Elected Members**

Assessing elected members' development needs is particularly complicated by the dual allegiance members have to their party as well as the local authority (Clarke & Stewart, 1996). This raises issues around the setting of personal goals to align them with those of the organisation - which would usually form the basis of organisational performance management systems as described above. Martin (1997) points to resistance to the provision of comprehensive support and training for councillors due both to officers claiming they lack resources for this, but also to members fearing 'capture' – “seeing training as a plot to turn them into apologists for inadequate services” – thus training is seen by members as “simply house training advocated by officers who want to keep us under control” (Martin, 1997). Clarke and Stewart (1996) draw attention to the possibility of councillors deliberately resisting their council's attempts to involve them in



development where “there may even be resistance for fear of further marginalisation or undue officer influence or even brain washing” (Clarke & Stewart, 1996).

This concern echoes the radical critiques of performance appraisal derived from the work of Foucault which claim the use of appraisal to cascade a shared vision of the organisation can be seen as the “development of a technology of power and domination” (Coates, 1996) and “is to communicate organisational norms and culture” (Townley 1989). Some researchers have found that gender, race and other social divisions have disadvantaged those being assessed who may not confirm to an organisation’s norms (Redman et al, 2000). Wheeler describes the recent David Edgar play “Playing with Fire” - this has at its heart “the hostility to ‘member training’ and the clear inference that it is some kind of brain washing process, to be avoided” (Wheeler, 2005b).

As discussed above, elected members are not in a contractual relationship with the local authority as officers are, creating an absence of power to compel members to develop their skills: thus “there are none of the usual levers to make politicians learn” (Goss, 2001). Goss points out that councillors come with their own democratic mandate, and so have no reason to adopt new skills or behaviours; further the assertiveness and debating skills that led individuals to become politicians also equip them to challenge any training they receive. “There is little to encourage councillors to learn to do things differently, and nothing to force them to do so” (Goss, 2001).

Investment in training and development within the public sector ‘remains low’ compared with the private sector; and local government has “fallen behind the police service and NHS in human resource investment” (Goss, 2001). The CIPD learning and development survey of 2005 shows that on average organizations spend £607.11 per year per employee on training - in the private sector this is £817.37; and in the public sector it is £414.43 (CIPD, 2005). Goss (2001) points to a ‘recent flurry’ of investment in local government management development for officers, however. Local government commentators say that it is important that elected members see their personal and organisational

development as important and that “a similar approach is developed to their side of the organisation as the officer side” (Clarke & Stewart, 1996).

Boxall and Purcell (2003) point out that investing in development raises issues of retention. Members may only serve for a comparatively brief time depending on the electoral cycle but the:

*“Opportunity to use training more powerfully really arises where firms have invested more comprehensively in recruitment, and thus built a labour pool with greater long-run potential” (Boxall & Purcell, 2003).*

Thus whilst officers in local authorities may be compelled to repay the costs of training if they leave their employment within a minimum time of completing their publicly funded course, elected members’ retention in the organisation is at least partly determined by the electoral system. Further, the importance of national issues in local elections, as well as the vagaries of the ‘First Past the Post’ system, can mean election results are not necessarily a reflection on the performance of the individual councillor but are determined by political issues beyond the members’ control (Clarke & Stewart, 1996).

In conclusion, the literature thus shows that the main way in which the performance of organisations is managed is by managing the performance of the individuals in them. There are particular problems with this for elected members due to their role as political representatives, however, including that elected members may not see the need to have their learning needs assessed by the local authority when they see themselves as having a mandate beyond this.

*How then can members’ development needs be appraised and development opportunities best be provided whilst ensuring public value?*

## 2.4 Providing Elected Member Development

### 2.4.1 Recognising Elected Members' Learning and Development Needs

As discussed above most councillors come to their local authorities via their political party and are recruited for their general commitment to the party and to public service. There are few specific qualifications for their eligibility to become party candidates other than party membership and the basic age and residence qualifications needed to stand for election. The Liverpool Labour Party asks that potential candidates have the following talents:

*“(Be) hard working and persistent – tramp the streets to get out our message;  
Listen to your residents and recognise their problems;  
Willing to get stuck in to fight for the needs of our communities;  
Joining the team to offer a consistent message across the city” (ALC, 2005).*

Colin Barrow, Chair of the IDeA, says that “no one is born with the skills and knowledge required to be a successful councillor” (IDeA, 2004a). Indeed, some members are elected without specifically having planned to become a councillor – offering to assist their party by standing as a candidate and finding themselves elected due to an unexpected political shift. Wilson and Game’s study of councillors showed that:

*“Far from being carefully planned, most of our small group of members found themselves projected almost unpreparedly into council membership. They were not exactly ‘reluctants’, but neither can they be seen as very driven ‘self-starters’, actively seeking and scheming for an additional career” (Wilson & Game, 1994).*

The attitude noted by Martin in 1997 where “most local parties show no inclination to equip the candidates they select or induct those who are successful at the ballot box” (Martin, 1997) is changing however, for example with the establishment of “Labour Party Academies’ as described above. That members come into the local authority with different skills and levels of understanding is being recognised and some form of development being offered to assist members to better perform their roles as governors of

the organisation. Thus local authorities, political parties and central government have now all recognised the need for elected member development, and the dearth of funding for this noted in the 1990's (Martin, 1997; Clarke & Stewart, 1996) has been largely rectified (LCC, 2000a; IDeA, 2004a).

Organisations such as the Improvement and Development Agency have been established especially to assist local authorities develop their members in order to best be able to improve their performance overall. The national 'Leadership Centre for Local Government' has recently been established to build the skills of executive cabinets within councils as "local politicians have great opportunities to improve the life chances of their communities but also to fail them". The Regional Employers' Organisations offer local authorities the opportunity to sign up to a 'Charter for Member Development' to signal their commitment to development of members (NWEO, 2005; IDeA, 2006). Local government journals hold award ceremonies to judge the best local authority member development programmes (MJ, 2006) and the Labour Party awarded some of its "Best Practice in Local Government" awards this year to Bristol and Liverpool Labour Groups for development work with candidates and with councillors (ALC, 2006).

The Labour Party nationally and locally insists that development not only be made available, but that its councillors "take up whatever training opportunities are available" and Labour groups have to appoint a group officer (usually the chief whip) to co-ordinate the organisation and provision of appropriate training for group members (ALC, 2005). The 'Association for Labour Councillors' guide says that:

*"Local government must continue to adapt to the constantly changing context in which we live and the new challenges we face. The party wants to support Labour councillors in the roles you are called on to play, and encourage continuous improvement" (ALC, 2005).*

The IDeA has developed a 'Skills Framework' that defines the skills that elected members need and lists indicators whereby councillors can demonstrate if they possess

the skills. For all members these have been defined as skills in community leadership; in regulating and monitoring (ie in terms of planning and licensing laws); in scrutiny and challenge; in communication skills - with both individuals and with groups; the skills for working in partnership; and the skills of political understanding. Additionally cabinet members have been defined as requiring skills in providing vision, and in managing performance; finally leaders require extra skills - in 'excellence in leadership' - on top of all the others (IDeA, 2005d).

Liverpool City Council established a 'Member Development Programme' in 2000 (LCC, 2000a). The programme was well-resourced with a budget (£30,000 in municipal year 2004-05) and three officers to provide development and cross-party research support – this was in addition to the dedicated support services allocated to each political group. A cross-party 'Member Development Working Group' was also established at this time to allow direct input from the councillors into the programme (LCC, 2000a).

Liverpool's programme was one of the leading local authority programmes when established and was commended in the 'Municipal Journal' awards in 2004 (MJ, 2004). It has however encountered problems with member attendance more recently, and the low level of member training been criticised in external reports, for example by the Audit Commission (AC, 2005a). Thus in 2005 a decision was made to re-launch the programme accredited by the University of Chester: the 'Liverpool Council Members Programme' (LCMP) began in October 2005 (LCC 2005b). To date the programme has launched three of its eight modules, and is still being developed, but has been well-received by members overall (LCC, 2006b)

**2.4.2 Providing Learning Opportunities for Adults**

In order to provide training and development opportunities it is important to have an understanding of the theories that dominate the thinking on learning and training that “provides a foundation of knowledge that can be called on when new approaches are needed” (CIPD, 2002). The theories of adult learning that have exerted most influence

over the last fifty years can be grouped into four clusters – and each theory subsequently influences the way that learning would be approached (Stewart, 1999).

Behaviouralist theories – based on the work of Skinner - use ‘reinforcers’ as a key feature, and here learning is enhanced through instruction, for example, by coaching and tuition and training courses. Such behavioural reinforcement can be effective at developing skills under controlled conditions such as the classroom but “its focus on the delivery of ‘correct’ responses to specific contrived situations may not prepare learners adequately to deal with new situations” (CIPD, 2002). The second main group of learning theories is cognitive learning theories, which see learning as a process of understanding and internalising the “principles, connections and facts about the world around us” (CIPD, 2002). Cognitive theories would point to the use of case studies and benchmarking to enhance learning in the workplace. The limitation of this type of learning may be that as it views learning as a process of information absorption there is a risk that learners may be measured on retaining information but not on their performance in a particular role.

Thirdly, there is a group of theories whereby learning may be seen as ‘knowledge construction’ - where the individual is viewed as an ‘active agent in their own learning’ - thus all knowledge is personal knowledge. This means that learning is a highly subjective issue and so can require significantly greater resource inputs in a training situation. These theories suggest that in the workplace methods such as mentoring, workshops and discussions with colleagues can be used for learning, along with reflection and creating portfolios. The final main group of theories sees learning as a social practice: these do not contradict the other three types of theories but argue that learning is “more effective when it arises and is applied in a social setting” (CIPD, 2002). Thus socially-mediated learning emphasises networking, participation in communities and team working. Organisational culture has a huge impact on how much informal interaction takes place between employees, however, and how much this is valued, but:

*“fortunately, no organisation can operate without a degree of interaction between its employees – even when such interaction is not recognised as beneficial, it remains a powerful source of learning within the organisation” (CIPD, 2002).*

Many factors affect the way that adults learn including the climate for learning, the learner’s motivation, the learner’s physical environment and individual learning styles (CIPD, 2002). The different theories of learning can be mixed to provide ‘blended’ learning – blended in both means of delivery, including classroom-based or on-line, and ‘blended’ in theoretical stance - which creates a “multi-layered and richer palette of learning methods” (CIPD, 2002).

#### **2.4.3 The Shift from ‘Training’ to ‘Learning’**

Approaches in learning theory, environmental changes and technological advance have combined to change the emphasis in development work from ‘training’ to ‘learning’, or ‘knowledge’, models in organisations (Sloman, 2001). Training in this context is defined as a “planned and systematic effort to modify or develop knowledge, skills and attitude through learning experience to achieve effective performance in an activity or range of activities in a work situation” (Stewart, 1999). Here the emphasis was on technical or specific skills being passed from someone with this knowledge to those without it; this was the main form of employee development in which employers invested throughout most of the twentieth century. However, in the last twenty years this has evolved into a ‘learning’ (or knowledge) model where learning is something each learner does, not something that is done to them (Sloman, 2001). The distinction between training and learning is defined as being where training is:

*“An intervention by the organization intended to advance business objectives” and learning is “a process by which a person constructs new knowledge, skills and capabilities” (Harrison, 2005).*

Research into adult training and work in organizations showed that “to train or teach is not to achieve learning” (Harrison, 2005). This shift has been influenced in particular by

the concept of experiential learning as described in the cycle devised by Kolb whereby people learn by doing, from infancy throughout life – passing through the four stages of experience; reflection; conceptualization; and testing (Stewart, 1999). This cycle has further been developed to include ‘double loop’ rather than ‘single loop’ learning: here the process of learning involves “rethinking paradigms and additional stages resulting in developing new insights from applying new learning to situations” (Goss, 2001).

New technology in particular has enabled the change of emphasis from the conventional model of ‘training’ to that of ‘learning’- the “changes that have arisen from connectivity have been so far-reaching that they demand a completely new conceptual approach to training in organisations” (Sloman, 2001). New technologies such as the internet and personal computers allow the focus to be placed on the individual learner: thus learning is “an ongoing process that lies in the domain of the individual” (Sloman, 2005a):

*“If a good learning or training programme is in place it can help the individual realise their potential and benefit both the individual and the organisation” (Sloman, 2005b).*

Whilst this shift is particularly evident in ‘knowledge intensive’ firms – such as law and advertising (Sloman, 2005a) - there may be a need for similar moves within local governance. Goss (2001) says that public services have seen an increase in management and other training but, while an expansion of training in itself is to be welcomed, the introduction of such programmes will not in itself be enough as “learning and change are active processes. People learn when they choose to learn” (Goss, 2001). Goss states that local government managers may not attend courses or not engage with them – “we have not yet paid attention to creating *reasons to learn*, and *reasons to apply learning*” (Goss, 2001).

One of barriers to success in the shift from teaching to learning is that of ‘learner expectations’ (Bell, 2005). These learner expectations include wanting to be taught something new by an ‘expert’ in an area and being given ‘magic answers’; learners also



expect that the ‘tutor’ will be the source of learning, not the group itself. Bell says that learners “need to overcome past ‘baggage’” and their expectations need to be managed. In order to influence expectations in advance those providing learning experiences must provide clear and unambiguous titles for sessions; provide briefing in advance on sessions; and choose the venue and layout with care – not in a ‘classroom’ style. Bell also says that whilst there is a need to manage expectations, some compromise is also needed – participants must not be made to feel uncomfortable as this is big barrier to learning. Dawes (2005) suggests the use of expert witness for interview by participants where the witness is an expert practitioner, not a teacher. Here the witness role involves learners so they “are likely to learn more from the exposure to those in whose footsteps they will be following” (Dawes, 2005).

#### **2.4.4 Learning in an Adversarial Organisational Environment**

The role of the political parties discussed above has an impact on the way development can be provided for elected members. Members have expressed reluctance to share learning and development experiences with members of rival parties with whom they are in direct competition for seats and power (Goss, 2001). In particular they are reluctant to reveal weaknesses in front of rivals:

*“In an adversarial environment, it is dangerous to admit weakness, and foolhardy to give opponents new weapons” (Goss, 2001).*

In Liverpool, members of one party have expressed reluctance to share information on best practice with members of opposing parties – for example, how to undertake casework effectively and so win votes from constituents will be a closely guarded secret (LCC, 2005a). The lack of acknowledgement of the involvement of political parties discussed above has an impact on members’ engagement with learning in the local authority - and ignoring members’ reservations may lead to disengagement by some members. Goss (2001) says that:

*“Learning needs to be made safe, which may mean activity within party groups, or action-learning sets or project teams” (Goss, 2001).*

Some local authorities do hold some development sessions for the separate groups, for example at Brent Council (IDeA, 2004c). The importance of developing the political groups themselves is also emphasised (Clarke & Stewart, 1996; Goss, 2001):

*“Teambuilding in a conventional sense may not be appropriate – since roles are unique and political sensitivities have to be acknowledged – but ‘group-building’ makes sense” (Goss, 2001).*

Clarke & Stewart (1996) explain that whilst training and development of members and the development of ‘*their* organisation’ (the political group) is very important this is often more difficult because the needs may not readily be spotted by the councillors and cannot be imposed by officers - “by its nature, it cannot be done to them by officers” (Clarke and Stewart, 1996). McDougall & Beattie (1996) point to the benefits generally of group learning “where an important focus is to enhance and support the learning of all its members” – groups help particularly with the transfer of learning back to the workplace and have the benefit of learning from those in other environments.

Some aspects of development are no different for elected members to that for other types of learners - it is as true for politicians as it is for managers that learning works best when it is directly connected to ‘real work’ - “processes for reflection, observation and problem-solving could be built into the day-to-day jobs of councillors” (Goss, 2001). Goss says that by bringing the real-life context of individual participants into training courses, it is possible to complete the learning cycle:

*“Reflecting on real experiences, forming explanatory hypotheses, planning on the basis of this and then returning to work to test out actions – and then reflecting again” (Goss, 2001).*

If learners are denied the opportunity to apply their learning on the return to their 'workplace' then learning experiences may not be translated into everyday practice. This is particularly difficult for councillors, however, as their 'workplace' as elected members is disjointed in location and time - often interspersed with their own professional work. The Employers Organisation calculates that members spend on average 21.5 hours per week on council duties, for which many are only paid a basic allowance (IDeA, 2004b). Unfortunately, there is a lack of opportunity to develop skills as a councillor due to the part-time voluntary nature of the role – "the absence of thinking time drives out innovation" (Goss, 2001). Time together as a political group is limited, and dominated by council business, and access to members in other local authorities and to conferences is limited by time and resources:

*"Change requires the stimulus of difference, the experience of 'otherness' to jolt us into seeing the problems in our own frame of reference' (Goss, 2001).*

Goss (2001) also points to the need for mentoring for members on an individual level: this is now supported at a national level by the Improvement and Development Agency who link members from different authorities (IDeA, 2005b). Finally there is a need for specific support to be provided for leaders – again this is now being recognized and provided by organisations such as the IDeA and the Leadership Centre for Local Government (IDeA, 2005c; Silvester, 2006).

In conclusion, there are many ways that adults can be provided with learning opportunities, although providing elected members with such opportunities requires particular consideration to their roles as politicians engaged in the democratic process.

*In what ways then can development be provided to ensure engagement and a safe learning environment for councillors?*

## **2.5 Summary: The Issues for Research**

Liverpool City Council - along with all local authorities - is under pressure to improve its performance. In addition Liverpool is under particular pressure due to its position as a core city, and its national prominence as the European Capital of Culture for 2008. Issues of governance and lack of strategic leadership have been raised in recent performance assessment and these issues identified as critical to improvement of the authority.

Meanwhile, the need for all elected members to have sufficient development and training opportunities to enable improvement is now widely recognised and such opportunities are largely being provided (ODPM, 2003; IDeA, 2004a; LCC, 2000b). The resources and recognition invested in providing elected member development in local authorities indicates an assumption that training for councillors must be beneficial and yet there is a lack of clear evidence of this. Further, how such development opportunities can best be delivered for elected members is not clear: elected members do not fit neatly into traditional models of human resource learning and development due to their political and democratic roles. Models for managing organisational performance by managing the performance of the individuals in them may be inappropriate for councillors whose mandate is derived from sources external to the local authority. In addition, the political parties in local government - to which most members belong - mean that councillors form a governing body which is openly adversarial. This unusual situation calls for specific considerations in the formulation and the means of delivery of development programmes for councillors.

There is then clearly a need to improve the performance of local authorities and the literature shows that this can be achieved in organisations by providing learning and development opportunities for the individuals in them. However, in order to obtain value from the resources invested in the development of elected members it is crucial that their specific situation be given full consideration. Without this, there can be lack of engagement and alienation from the development process and thus the possibility that no benefit to the organisation will be seen. This dissertation will now explain the process of the research undertaken to examine these issues in further detail.

### **3. Methodology: How was the Research Conducted?**

#### **3.1 Introduction: Researching Elected Member Development**

The literature search described in the previous chapter indicates that there are three main issues where further information is required to help answer the research question “how can effective elected member development be provided to enable performance improvement at Liverpool City Council?” There is then a need for research to discover:-

- *What evidence there is – if any - that elected member development can lead to improved local authority performance;*
- *How members’ development needs can be appraised and development opportunities best be provided whilst ensuring public value; and*
- *In what ways development can be provided to ensure engagement and a safe learning environment for all councillors?*

This section examines how the primary research was carried out and why particular methods were chosen to try to answer the research question. The section first examines the overall philosophy of the research and its approach and strategy. Saunders *et al* (2003) say that the approach taken to research is important as it “enables you to take a more informed decision about your research design”, thus defining the subsequent methods used. The dissertation aims to answer a research question with three parts (as above) and this required different approaches and methods to be used in order to obtain as complete a picture as possible.

This chapter explains that the research uses both deductive and inductive approaches, and makes use of two different research methods - a questionnaire survey and semi-structured interviews. The subjects of the project and the way that the information was gathered are detailed in this section. Some of the limitations of this research are also examined – including the small size of the questionnaire sample and that information could be gathered from one political group only. Finally the ethics of this research are examined – being a researcher in an area that I am involved in as a council officer has implications for both the methods and the strategy used and has an effect on information access.

### 3.2 Overall Philosophy

Overall the research has an ‘interpretivist’ - as opposed to positivist - philosophy. Fisher (2004) says people who take an interpretative philosophy see the link between understanding and action as an indirect one where “improving understanding and knowledge does not reveal the best actions to take” (Fisher, 2004). The link between action and understanding is seen as indirect here because as the world is complex and options for action are not always clear “as the link between understanding and action is mediated through people’s thinking, values and relationships with each other” (Fisher, 2004). This contrasts with positivist research whereby the researcher assumes the role of objective analyst “coolly making detached interpretations about those data that have been collected in an apparently value-free manner” (Saunders *et al*, 2003).

An interpretivist research philosophy can be used when research requires that the details of the situation be discovered – as Remenyi *et al* say “to understand the reality or perhaps a reality working behind them” (in Saunders *et al*, 2003). Fisher also points to the ‘processual perspective’ in interpretative research, where there is an attempt to “generalize about how meaning is developed through human interactions” (2004). The research is also essentially ‘exploratory’ in that it is a means of finding out “what is happening: to seek new insights; to ask questions and to assess phenomena in a new light” (Saunders *et al*, 2003).

A further element is that the research was conducted by a ‘practitioner-researcher’ – Fisher (2004) says that “interpretative researchers are often participants in the processes they are studying”, in particular as a complex understanding of a subject may only be achieved through a close involvement with the subject of research. Being a participant in the research brings advantages – in terms of a shared understanding with the research subjects, and of having valuable background knowledge. There are also disadvantages to the practitioner-researcher role, however, such as assumptions about basic knowledge, problems of the researcher’s status potentially inhibiting research, increased expectations of change for those whom the researcher works with, and the restrictions it can place on access to information, which is discussed further below.

### **3.3 The Research Strategy and Approach**

The research required different approaches and strategies in order to obtain as clear a picture as possible of the overall situation. The study made use of both inductive and deductive approaches to gather information on different aspects of the question, and in terms of strategy the research contained elements of both a survey (of other local authorities) and a case study (of Liverpool City Council) as described below.

#### **3.3.1 Researching whether Elected Member Development can lead to improved Local Authority Performance**

In order to discover if providing resources for elected member development can lead to performance improvement in local authorities it was necessary to gather comparative information from many councils. For this part of the research techniques with a bias to deduction (or testing theory) were used - where a hypothesis is formulated and then data follows theory. Saunders *et al* (2003) say that the deductive approach has three main characteristics – first, the search to explain causal relationships between variables; the second is that concepts need to be ‘operationalised’ in a way that enables facts to be measured quantitatively; and thirdly the deductive approach requires samples of sufficient numerical size to allow for generalisation to be made.

Thus this part of the research began with the hypothesis that providing more elected member development could lead to improved local authority performance and set out to gather quantitative data to investigate whether this was the case. In particular it was important to obtain information on the resources invested by each authority in providing its elected members with development opportunities, which could subsequently be cross-referenced with the performance scores of the various authorities to see if there was a relationship between these variables. To obtain the data on other local authorities’ elected member development programmes a survey in the form of a questionnaire was used. Jankowicz (2000) says a survey is “particularly useful when you want to contact relatively large numbers of people to obtain data on the same issue or issues, often by posing the same questions to all” (Jankowicz, 2000). A survey enables large amounts of comparative data to be gathered relatively quickly and then analysed, however, surveys

have disadvantages also. As Jankowicz (2000) points out the word ‘survey’ always indicates ‘human respondents’ - which gives rise to the main problem associated with the survey method which is that:

*“You’re dealing with verbal reports, either oral or written, and before you can begin interpreting them, you’re limited to the data which people are able and willing to report in the first place” (Jankowicz, 2000).*

### **3.3.2 Researching how Development Opportunities can best be provided for Elected Members and how Consideration can be given to their Political Role**

To answer the second and third parts of the research question a more exploratory method was required to gather data, in addition to the survey information on development provision from the other local authorities. To do this the approach and strategy described above needed to be complemented with some research using elements of an inductive, or ‘building theory’ approach. This approach is the other way around to deductive techniques and is described by Saunders *et al* (2003) as an approach “in which you would collect data and develop theory as a result of your data analysis”. Saunders *et al* (2003) say that induction emphasises “gaining an understanding of the meanings humans attach to events”, as well as a close understanding of the research context, and the collection of qualitative data.

Saunders *et al* (2003) explain that it may be more appropriate to generate data and analyse and reflect on what theoretical themes the data are suggesting “with research that is new, is exciting much debate, and on which there is little existing literature” (Saunders *et al*, 2003). This is the case with elected member development to an extent – which is under discussion both in national policy and at Liverpool City Council. Further an inductive approach is more appropriate where the “researcher is part of the research process” (Saunders *et al*, 2003), as is the case in this dissertation.

The induction theory approach was used to try to understand how elected members perceive training programmes, how they would wish them to be delivered and what



consideration they feel needs to be given to them in their unique positions as elected representatives of political parties. The questionnaire survey included requests for information on the second and third parts of the research question as well as requests for information on the first part - but this also was supplemented with a case study of Liverpool including a series of semi-structured interviews with members at Liverpool City Council.

It was particularly important to obtain information on members' experiences at Liverpool as the research question aims to discover how performance at Liverpool City Council can be improved and the interviews were more suitable ways of obtaining qualitative information from which theory could be developed. Saunders *et al* (2003) point out that meaning is not always 'dependent on number' and that qualitative data may be needed with more 'ambiguous and elastic' concepts. Saunders *et al* (2003) say qualitative data are "associated with such concepts and are characterized by their richness and fullness based on your opportunity to explore a subject in as real a manner as is possible" (Saunders *et al*, 2003).

### **3.3.3 Combining Research Approaches, Strategies and Methods**

Saunders *et al* (2003) point out that a contrast can be drawn between with the 'thin' abstraction or description that results from quantitative data collection and the 'thick' or 'thorough' abstraction associated with qualitative data. The interviews with members of Liverpool City Council yielded qualitative data which could be used to supplement the quantitative data from the survey where appropriate, and to answer parts of the research question that it was not possible to obtain answers to from a survey. Jankowicz (2000) says that combining both qualitative and quantitative methods can be useful either:

*"Because your design call for it, or because you want to use the results from one method to cross-check the results from another: an approach known 'triangulation'" (Jankowicz, 2000).*

In particular, using a combination of interviews and questionnaires allowed information from Liverpool City Council to be checked with information from other authorities in order to rule out that some issues may be the result of specific problems at Liverpool. For example, the reservations expressed by members of the Opposition Group at Liverpool to cross-party training may have been a peculiarity of the Liverpool Labour Group, but information from Labour Groups in other authorities showed that this was not the case. This reflects Kane (1985) who explains that to obtain the most complete and accurate research information you would:

*‘Choose the centre (of the overlap) in which you get the information through interviews and questionnaire, reinforced by observation, and checked through documentary analysis’ (Kane, in Jankowicz, 2000).*

### **3.4 Data Collection Methods**

#### **3.4.1 Questionnaires to other Local Authorities**

The first stage of the primary research consisted of a survey in the form of a written self-administered questionnaire to other local authorities to gather comparative data on the member training and development programmes in them (see Appendix 1). Saunders *et al* (2003) point out that “the type of questionnaire you choose will affect the number of people who respond” and that interviewer-administered questionnaires will usually have a higher response rate than self-administered questionnaires. However, the questionnaire for this research was designed for recipients in other local authorities with whom I was already in regular contact via a national ‘Labour Party Assistants Network’ (LPAN) so I expected a positive response.

The ‘Labour Party Assistants Network’ is a network of officer colleagues based in other Labour Group offices around the country who provide support services to Labour councillors. The network provides on-line contact for its members across the country in order that they can obtain information regarding best practice and various other local government and political issues needed for working with elected members. The network members also meet at conferences once or twice a year. There are 66 local authorities

represented by members on the LPAN network out of the 389 local authorities in England - that is, 17% of all authorities.

The purpose of contacting my LPAN colleagues - and not other council officers in the local authorities - was two-fold. First there was the comparative ease of reaching a named officer in other councils as I am already in regular contact with many of them. Second, by using contacts with a shared background I hoped the information would be more reliable, particularly due to the LPAN members understanding of elected members positions as politicians. As Jankowicz says “the stories people tell you will depend on their interpretation of your reasons for asking!” (Jankowicz, 2000).

The questionnaire was thus designed to be sent to a ‘purposive sample’ - that is, sampling that enables the selection of “cases that will best enable you to answer your research question(s) and to meet your objectives” (Saunders *et al*, 2003). Purposive sampling can be used when the researcher is working with small samples and wishes to select cases that are particularly informative. The questionnaire was thus not designed to return information that was statistically significant – which would require nearly 200 responses from a total sample of 389 local authorities to provide a 95% level of certainty even with a 5% margin of error (Saunders *et al*, 2003) - instead it was designed to allow a speedy collection of information from a source with a shared background to the researcher.

This method clearly has a disadvantage in only gathering information from Labour Groups, and not from other political groups, however. Yet using the LPAN contacts did provide a random sample of authorities in terms of political control - as in some councils the Labour Group are in administration and in some they are in opposition, or are a minority group. Thus although the survey sought only the views of officers in Labour Groups, it was not a survey only of Labour Councils, nor only of Opposition Groups. Further, the information gathered could be effectively compared with the qualitative information from Liverpool City Council’s Labour Group members, as discussed below, without being distorted by other political issues. The full details of the composition and political control of the authorities surveyed is presented at section 4.2.

The questionnaire was designed using the information gathered from the literature review and from my own experience at Liverpool City Council. It was first piloted informally on some colleagues in my own council to check whether as a research instrument it was comprehensible to those presented with it - this resulted in minor changes to the lay-out. The questionnaire was then sent out by post to the updated database created from the list of LPAN members, which was continuously updated and revised as responses came back – for example, some members had left and been replaced by new LPAN members.

The questionnaire was initially sent out at the end of January 2006 as a hard copy in the post with a covering letter and envelope for return. It was sent hard copy to be less intrusive to people's work in terms of filling up email in-boxes: at the same time I put an electronic message on the LPAN communal email advising colleagues that I was posting this questionnaire to them but that it could be sent electronically if they preferred. Several people then emailed to request an electronic version instead which was sent.

The timing for sending this questionnaire was important as many LPAN colleagues were due at a conference in mid-February and I could remind members there to complete them. After two weeks 35 questionnaires had been returned out of the 65 forms that were sent out; and after 4 weeks individual electronic reminder emails were sent (not a message on the communal email system) to those on the network who still had not returned the forms. This meant that after 6 weeks I received 43 completed forms - that is, 66.2% had been completed and returned. The results of the questionnaires are fully presented in Chapter 4 and a summary of all the responses to all questions from the authorities is at Appendix 2.

### **3.4.2 Interviewing Members of Liverpool City Council**

The second part of the primary research was a case study of the elected member development programme at Liverpool City Council in particular to help answer the second and third parts of the research question above. Thus whilst the purpose of the first stage of the primary research was to gather information from a large number of sources to allow for comparisons to be made, the second stage was designed to gather in-depth

information of a more qualitative nature to allow details of the situation at Liverpool City Council to be discussed. Saunders *et al* (2003) quote Robson where a case study is defined as:

*“A strategy for doing research which involves an empirical investigation of a particular contemporary phenomenon within its real life context using multiple sources of evidence” (Robson in Saunders et al, 2003).*

The literature search (in Chapter 2 above) included information on Liverpool City Council’s elected member development programme, which had been established in 2000 and re-launched as an accredited modular programme in 2005. The second part of the primary research utilised semi-structured interviews with members of Liverpool City Council to provide data for examining how the development needs of councillors in Liverpool could be met, and how members can be provided with effective and accessible training opportunities in their roles as elected representatives in the local authority.

Semi-structured interviews provided the opportunity to probe answers and encourage interviewees to elaborate or build on relevant points and investigate their current approach to member development, including their motivation for undertaking development and how members feel it could be delivered to most benefit them:

*“Semi-structured and in-depth, or non-standardised, interviews are used in qualitative research in order to conduct discussions not only to reveal the ‘what’ and the ‘how’ but also to place more emphasis on exploring the ‘why’” (Saunders et al, 2003).*

Further, interviews were deemed a more suitable means of contacting elected members than written questionnaires as I am aware from my work as a council officer that elected members already feel they are inundated with requests requiring responses, and do not like having more forms to fill in. This reflects Saunders *et al* (2003) who state that:

*“We have found that managers are more likely to agree to be interviewed, rather than fill in a questionnaire, especially where the interview topic is seen to be interesting and relevant to their current work” (Saunders et al, 2003).*

In addition, the interview can benefit the interviewee as it provides them with the opportunity to reflect on their work, as well as to receive ‘feedback and personal assurance’ about the way in which information will be used (Saunders et al, 2003).

My position in the Opposition Office at Liverpool City Council means that I am in contact with members of the Labour Group on a daily basis and so access to them was not an issue. Five subjects were chosen for interview: the choice was determined by the need to ensure a balance of interview subjects in terms of senior and backbench members; in terms of balancing newer members and those with longer service; and in terms of providing a variety in the level of members’ current qualifications.

The questions were drafted from a combination of the study of the literature, the questionnaire results from the other local authorities and my experience of working with the members (see copy of questions used at Appendix 3). The interviews were conducted over two weeks at the end of March and the beginning of April 2006 - to accommodate feedback on the first modules of Council Members’ Programme - and each took about an hour and a half. The members were advised that the interview was for academic work, but that ideas could be fed back into corporate and Labour Group development work. Members were advised that their full names would not be used. The interviews were not taped as this felt overly formal - instead I made notes on the members’ answers and periodically checked these back with the member in the course of the interview. On one occasion I telephoned the member later to check the note I had made of their comment.

The information from the five interviews is included in both Chapter 4 and the analysis in Chapter 5 and is used for comparison between the situation at other local authorities and at Liverpool City Council, and to analyse how development could best be provided for all elected members in Liverpool. A table summary of all the interviews is at Appendix 4.

### 3.5 Ethical Issues, Access and Limitations of the Methodology

The research is clearly limited by both the survey and case study being undertaken with elected members from one political group only. This is mitigated to an extent as the *councils surveyed are under the control of a variety of political parties, but all primary* research information comes from Labour members and officers working with Labour members. This limitation is closely bound up with issues of ethics and of access: my role with the Labour Group at Liverpool City Council has a profound effect on my research with elected members.

Being Head of the Opposition Office at Liverpool City Council creates an ethical issue as the partisan nature of representative politics means it would not be reasonable to expect Liberal Democrat councillors in Liverpool to speak frankly to me in my role as researcher. Although I am a council officer and not a political assistant (employed directly by the political group) or a politician, I am acutely aware of the political sensitivity of my role and so I did not seek to interview elected members of the Administration Group in Liverpool. Further, due to my role I did not seek to contact other political groups at other local authorities – instead I contacted officers who work with other Labour groups only.

Saunders *et al* (2003) point out that as an ‘internal’ or ‘participant researcher’ in an organisation problems associated with negotiating physical or continuing access will not be an issue “at least where you undertake research in your ‘own part’ of the organisation” however:

*“Your status in the organisation may pose particular problems in relation to cognitive access. This may be related to suspicions about why you are undertaking your research project and the use that will be made of the data” (Saunders et al, 2003).*

Conversely my role with Labour councillors does have a positive effect in terms of ease of access to Labour councillors in Liverpool and at other authorities, as well as to Labour Party conferences and to policy information.

A second limitation of the research is my close relationship with the interviewees: as mentioned above I am a participant in this research, not a neutral observer. There are ethical issues raised by my dual role as employee and service provider in my professional work and my role as student and researcher dealing with many of the same issues. Jankowicz (2000) explains that in this instance one of the most common ethical issues that I may encounter “concerns people’s expectations” as this type of project can raise expectations of change.

A third limitation to the research is the small sample size of the survey of other local authorities as mentioned above. 43 councils were surveyed from a potential sample of all 389 local authorities - this is just over 11% - which is not sufficient for statistical analysis. Given sufficient time it would be theoretically possible to contact all 389 local authorities in the country, although a point of contact other than the officer in the Labour Group would have to be used as not all councils would have a directly equivalent officer.

### **3.6 Summary**

This chapter has explained how the research was designed to try to provide as much information as possible to answer the question “how can effective elected member development be provided to enable performance improvement at Liverpool City Council?” The chapter explained that three main parts to the research question emerged from the literature and these required different research approaches, different strategies and different data collection methods to provide as complete a picture as possible. The chapter explained the overall philosophy of the research and gave details of the subjects of the research and the process utilised for collecting the data. The chapter also examined some of the limitations of the research and the ethical and access issues involved.

In Chapter 4 all the findings from the survey and some of the interview data are presented. In Chapter 5 the survey information is analysed in depth: the information is cross-referenced with the authorities’ performance scores and also juxtaposed with the situation at Liverpool, using the case study information from the interviews with members at Liverpool City Council. This will then allow recommendations to be made.



## 4. Research Findings: The Results of the Primary Research

### 4.1 Introduction: How can effective elected member development be provided to enable performance improvement at Liverpool City Council?

In this chapter the results from the primary research are presented. As discussed in Chapter 3, the research used both a questionnaire to survey other local authorities and interviews for a case study of Liverpool City Council. The research question was examined in three main parts: first, whether elected member development can improve local authority performance; second, how it can best be provided; and third, what consideration needs to be given to the political roles of members?

The results of the research are presented below in the following three sections:-

- i) An overview of all the local authorities that were surveyed, including their type, their political control and their current performance scores, to provide background information;
- ii) The research findings relating to the provision of elected member development in the local authorities surveyed and the level of resources invested in this, including the situation at Liverpool City Council: this section presents data to try to answer the first and second parts of the research question; and
- iii) The findings relating to the provision of development for the political groups in the different authorities, again compared with the situation in Liverpool City Council: this section provides information for the third part of the research question in particular.

**Presentation of the Results from the Questionnaires:** As discussed in Chapter 3, there were 43 questionnaire forms returned from other local authorities from the 65 that were sent out - this represents a 66.2% return rate. This is a high rate for questionnaire returns but this remains a small sample and the results must be viewed with caution. Below the numerical results for each survey question are given and the proportion of each result as a percentage of all responses to each survey question is also provided in brackets. The percentage figures are rounded to one decimal point.

The survey results are also shown in diagram form where there are a variety of responses to questions – although diagrams are not always used if questions have only a ‘yes’, ‘no’ or ‘do not know’ option. Where appropriate a note is also made of the situation at Liverpool City Council for comparison - but Liverpool is not included in the numerical survey figures which are based on the 43 surveyed authorities only. A compilation of the total responses from all the 43 authorities in the survey to the questions is at Appendix 2.

**Presentation of the Results from the Interviews:** Semi-structured interviews were conducted with five members of the Opposition Group on Liverpool City Council as described in Chapter 3. The members chosen are a balanced sample from the Group in terms of their length of service as councillors, their positions in the group, and in their academic qualifications to date. Some of the data from the interviews are presented in this chapter in combination with the results from the questionnaires of other councils to supplement the survey information. In particular, interview results are presented with reference to the way in which members would like elected member development provided and what particular needs members have due to their political roles. Some of the interview data is presented in Chapter 5 only, however, in order to avoid repetition. All interview data and councillor information is summarised in a table at Appendix 4.

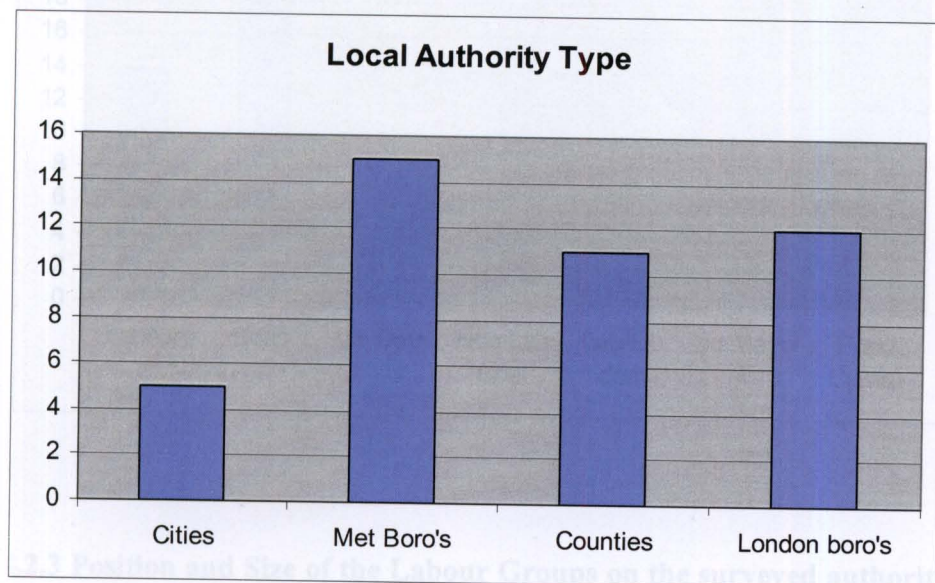
## **4.2 An Overview of the Local Authorities surveyed**

As can be seen in sections 4.1.1 to 4.1.3, the local authorities in the survey were varied in their type and in their political control. As explained in Chapter 3, the information from each authority was gathered via the Labour Group office in each council. However, although this was a survey of Labour groups, it was not a survey of opposition groups; nor a survey of Labour councils – indeed, councils run by all the main political groups are included in the survey. Section 4.1.4 shows the authorities’ performance levels in 2005 – those with all levels of performance were represented in the survey.

*NB. All the information on local authority control and composition was gathered before the May 2006 Local Government Elections, representing the situation at January / February 2006.*

**4.2.1 Local Authority Type** – of the 43 local authorities who returned questionnaires in survey there were five city councils (11.6%); fifteen metropolitan borough councils (34.9%); eleven county councils (25.6%) and twelve London boroughs (including Westminster as a London borough, not a city council) (27.9%). This means a range of council types are in the survey (figure 1). Liverpool's local authority is a city council.

**Figure 1 - Local Authorities surveyed by Type**



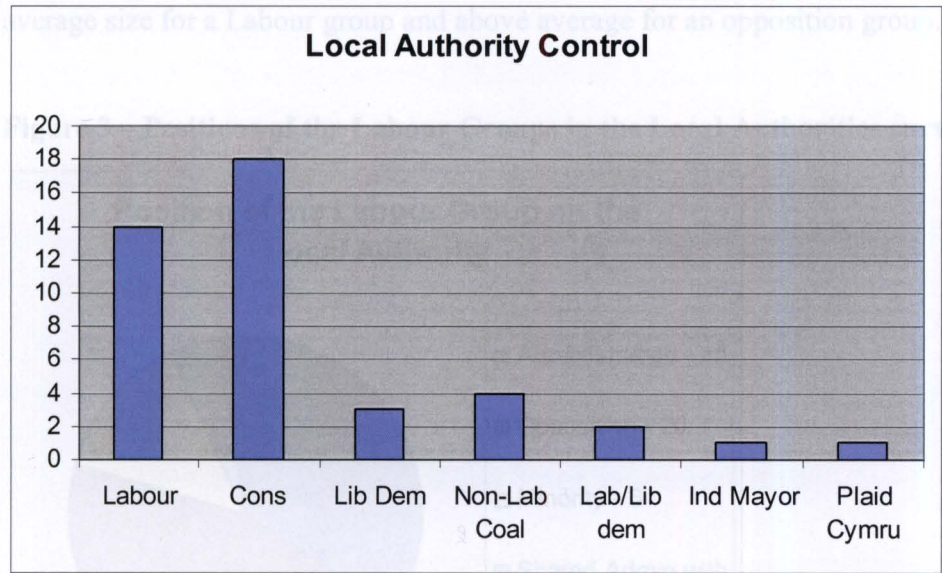
**4.2.2 Local Authority Control** – of the 43 respondents there were fourteen local authorities with Labour in control (or Administration), including two with Labour directly-elected mayors (32.6%); eighteen under Conservative control (41.9%); three under Liberal Democrat control (7.0%) and eight others (18.6%). Of the 'others' there were four with coalitions between the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats and / or the Green party (9.3% of all local authorities surveyed); two joint Labour / Liberal Democrat authorities (4.7%); one with an independent elected mayor (2.3%) and one Plaid Cymru (Welsh National) administration (2.3%).

Local authorities with a wide range of types of political control are in the survey, including all three main political parties (figure 2). It is relevant that councils with different controlling groups are represented in the survey as this makes it more



representative. Liverpool City Council is under Liberal Democrat control and it does not have a directly elected mayor.

Figure 2 – Local Authorities surveyed by Controlling Group



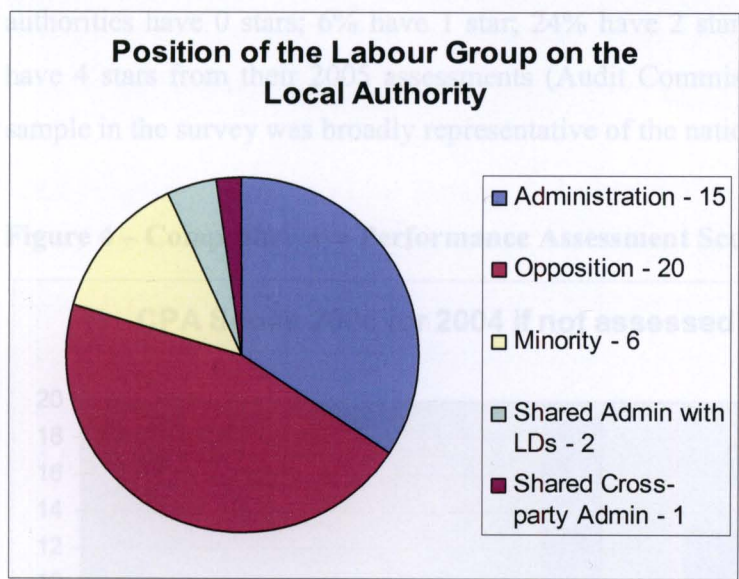
**4.2.3 Position and Size of the Labour Groups on the surveyed authorities** – of the 43 Labour Groups in the survey fifteen are in administration (ie are the controlling group on local authority), this is 34.9%; two are in a shared administration with Liberal Democrat groups (4.7%); 20 are in opposition (46.5%); six are the minority group on their authorities (14%); and one is part of a shared cabinet with a independent elected mayor (2.3%) (figure 3). In Liverpool the Labour Group is in Opposition.

The Labour groups in the survey are in various different positions on the 43 authorities surveyed. This is important as the information in the survey comes only from officers working with Labour Groups and the position of the Labour Group on the authority could influence its experience of elected member development – for example, if all respondents surveyed worked with opposition groups.

On average the Labour Groups have 21.7 members: – 37.8 on average where groups are in administration; 17.6 on average where groups are in opposition; and 9.7 on average where groups are a minority. There are therefore political groups of various sizes in the survey. There are 27 members of the Liverpool Labour Group (pre-May 2006), an above-average size for a Labour group and above average for an opposition group.

The spread of CPA scores across this sample of local authorities is very similar to the

**Figure 3 – Positions of the Labour Groups in the Local Authorities surveyed**



**4.2.4 Comprehensive Performance Assessment Scores** - the questionnaire asked the respondents for their local authority's 2005 Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) score. Of those who had had this assessment one had received no stars (2.3%); one had one star (2.3%); eight had two stars (18.6%); seventeen had three stars (39.5%); ten had four stars (23.3%). One (Welsh) authority does not have a CPA score (2.3%).

The local authorities' CPA scores will be crucial in examining any link between local

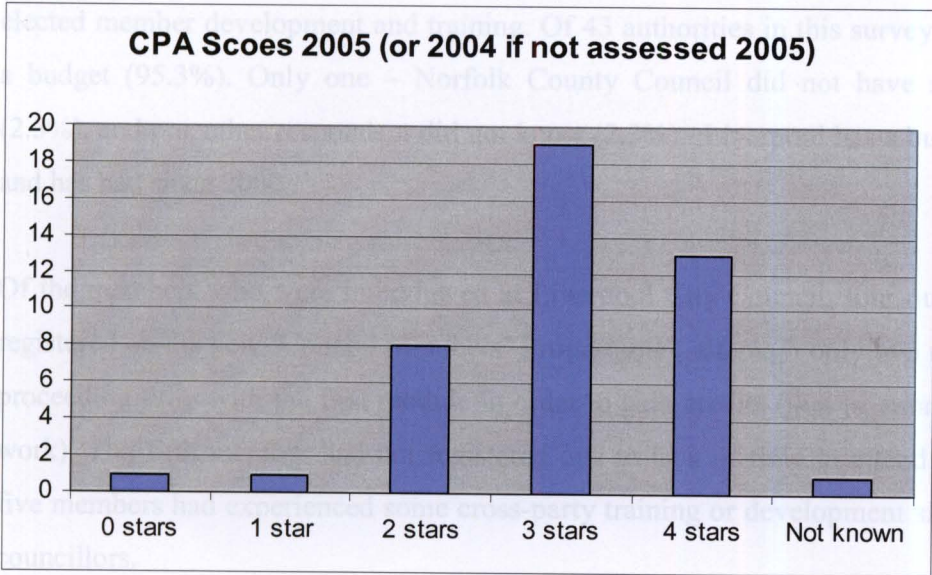
As discussed in Chapter 2, the CPA categories had changed in 2005 and the new assessments brought together the three elements of an annual service assessment, use of resources and a periodic corporate assessment to give a single category. Five authorities had not undergone a CPA assessment in 2005 and provided their 2004 scores (11.6%) – of these five, there were two that had been assessed as 'good' (4.7%) and three as 'excellent' in 2004 (7.0%). For the purpose of this survey these were placed in the



equivalent score for 2005 – thus ‘excellent’ is equal to 4 stars, and ‘good’ to three. This makes nineteen 3 star authorities (44.2%) and thirteen 4-star authorities (30.2%) in total (figure 4). Liverpool City Council scored 2 stars in its 2005 Comprehensive Performance Assessment.

The spread of CPA scores across this sample of local authorities is very similar to the national spread of all authorities assessed by the Audit Commission. Nationally 1% of authorities have 0 stars; 6% have 1 star; 24% have 2 stars; 42% have 3 stars and 28% have 4 stars from their 2005 assessments (Audit Commission, 2005b). This means the sample in the survey was broadly representative of the national situation.

**Figure 4 – Comprehensive Performance Assessment Scores 2005 (or 2004)**



The local authorities’ CPA scores will be crucial in examining any link between local authority performance and the provision of elected member development in councils. This will be examined in greater depth in Chapter 5 where the results of the performance scores are cross-referenced with the results of the research into the provision of elected member development in each authority, which is provided in section 4.3.1. – 4.3.8 below.

## **4.3 The Provision of Elected Member Development**

**4.3.1 Provision of a Corporate (Cross-party) Elected Member Development Programme** – almost all the local authorities surveyed provide a corporate (cross-party) programme for elected member development and training. Of 43 authorities in this survey 41 have such a programme (95.3%). Only one – City of Westminster - did not have such a programme (2.3%), and one other respondent did not know (2.3%). Liverpool City Council has a corporate (cross-party) programme for member development and training.

**4.3.2 Provision of Budgets for Elected Member Development and Training** - almost all the local authorities represented have a specific budget set aside for cross-party elected member development and training. Of 43 authorities in this survey, 41 have such a budget (95.3%). Only one – Norfolk County Council did not have such a budget (2.3%), and one other respondent did not know (2.3%). Liverpool has a budget for EMD and has had since 2000.

Of the members who were interviewed at Liverpool City Council, four out of five were registered on the new ‘Council Members’ Programme’, although only two members were proceeding fully with the first module in order to gain credits (that is, submitting written work). The fifth member had not registered due to lack of time to attend. However, all five members had experienced some cross-party training or development since becoming councillors.

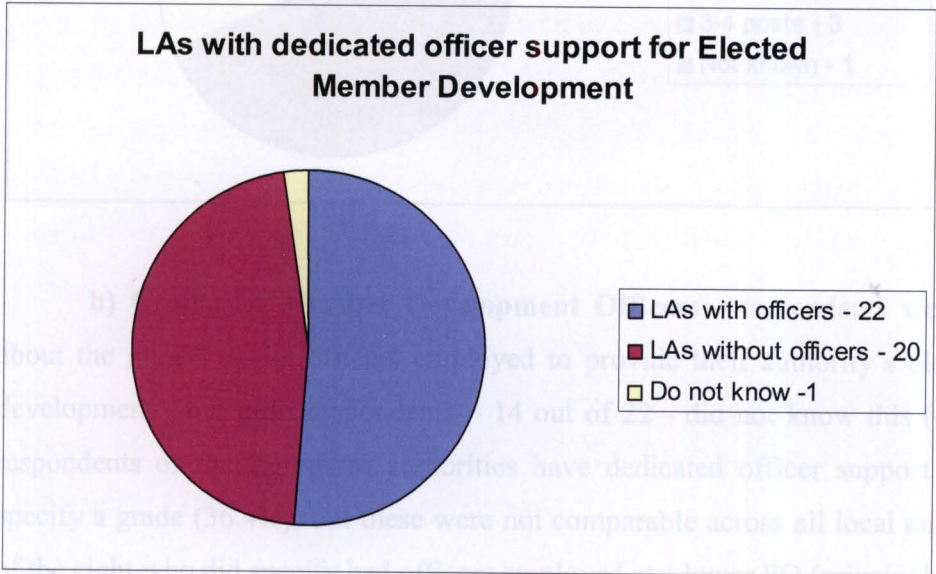
The views of the interviewees on the provision of a corporate elected member development programme were mixed: the two newest members were concerned that the induction programme was insufficient, further that information was “already late” by the time they were elected; both of these two members are submitting work for the Council Members’ Programme, however. Another member considered the training on use of information technology had been ‘good’. The interviews revealed strong resistance to cross-party training from two of the members.



**4.3.3 Officer Support for Elected Member Training and Development** – respondents in the other authorities were asked whether their authorities had dedicated officers to provide the corporate (cross-party) member training and development in their local authority. Of the local authorities in the survey, 22 had at least one dedicated part-time officer employed to provide EMD (51.2%); twenty did not (46.5%); and one respondent did not know (2.3%) (figure 5). Liverpool has a dedicated EMD officer.

Only those authorities with officers employed exclusively on member development were counted as a ‘yes’ in this question, although respondents in four of the authorities where there was no dedicated officer support stated that some officers do have this responsibility as a part of their duties, for example, Bedford BC and Northampton BC.

**Figure 5 – Number of Authorities with Dedicated Officer Support for EMD**

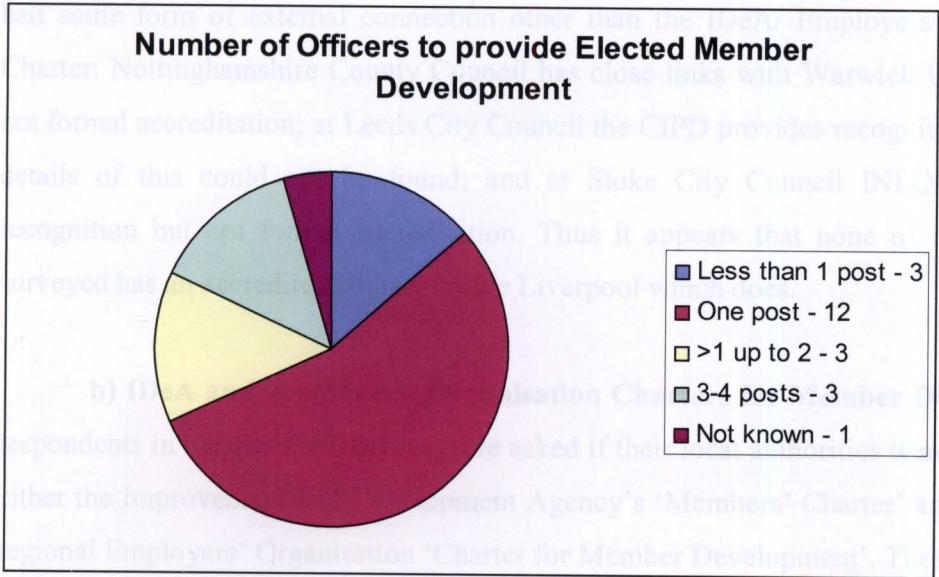


**a) Number of Dedicated Officers for EMD per Authority** – in the 22 authorities that had dedicated EMD officers, respondents were also asked how many officers there were in the authority. There were three authorities with less than one whole officer for EMD (this was one or more part-time posts, totaling less than one full-time equivalent post) - 6.9% of all 43 authorities in the survey; twelve had one officer (27.9%); three had more than one and up to two full-time posts (7.0%); three local



authorities had three officers to provide this (7.0%) and one did not know the numbers (2.3%) (figure 6). Liverpool's Member Development service currently has one dedicated officer.

**Figure 6 – Number of Dedicated Officer Posts for Elected Member Development per Local Authority**



**b) Grades of Member Development Officers** - respondents were also asked about the grades of the officers employed to provide their authority's elected member development - but most respondents – 14 out of 22 - did not know this (63.6%). Eight respondents of the 22 whose authorities have dedicated officer support were able to specify a grade (36.4%), but these were not comparable across all local authorities. Five of the eight who did specify had officers employed at a lower PO (principal officer) grade – PO2 to PO5. Liverpool's Member Development service currently has one officer who is on a lower grade PO post.

**4.3.4 Recognition of Member Development Courses –**

**a) Formal Accreditation** - respondents in other authorities were asked about accreditation or other recognition of their elected member development programme by external organisations. Seven of the 43 local authorities in this survey claimed to have

some form of accreditation or external recognition for their councillor training programmes either in place or being put in place. However, further investigation into which body was providing recognition showed that three of the seven were recognized by the IDeA/ Employers' Organisation Charter only – which is the subject of a separate question (below). Further, Shropshire County Council in fact has internal accreditation only and rewards members who achieve certain levels of credits. Thus only three (7%) had some form of external connection other than the IDeA/ Employers' Organisation Charter: Nottinghamshire County Council has close links with Warwick University, but not formal accreditation; at Leeds City Council the CIPD provides recognition – although details of this could not be found; and at Stoke City Council INLOGOV provide recognition but not formal accreditation. Thus it appears that none of the authorities surveyed has an accredited course, unlike Liverpool which does.

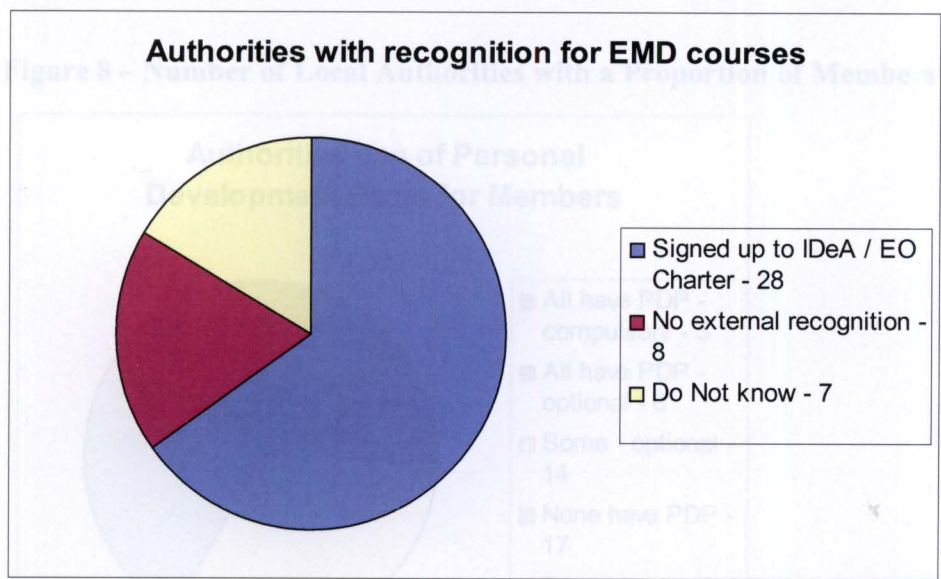
**b) IDeA and Employers' Organisation Charters for Member Development –** respondents in the other authorities were asked if their local authorities were signed up to either the Improvement and Development Agency's 'Members' Charter' and / or to their regional Employers' Organisation 'Charter for Member Development'. These charters are a statement of an authority's commitment to developing and supporting its elected councillors which aim to help councils adopt a structured approach to councillor development and to building elected member capacity (IDeA, 2005). However, the responses are complicated by the fact that most regions now have their own charters, which in the main are 'joint badged' with the IDeA, although previously the Employers' Organisation Charter was a separate charter.

Thus 28 respondents are signed up to one or both charters (62.8%); eight are not signed up to either (18.6%) - although six specifically state that this is currently in process, including Basingstoke and Medway Borough Councils and Cumbria County Council; and seven do not know if their authority is signed up to either (14%) (figure 7).

Liverpool City Council is not signed up the Member Development Charter but Liverpool but does have a course accredited by the University of Chester, and completion of the

course (eight modules) can lead to a Certificate in Higher Education level qualification. The members interviewed had mixed views on the importance of this accreditation, however. Three members said their view of the Council Members' Programme was not affected one way or the other by the fact that it is accredited – but two of these three were submitting work to gain credits. The other two members both agreed that it was a good idea that the course was accredited (one comment was 'it gives it status'), but neither were submitting work, one not even being registered on the course.

Figure 7 – Number of Authorities with Recognition of EMD Courses



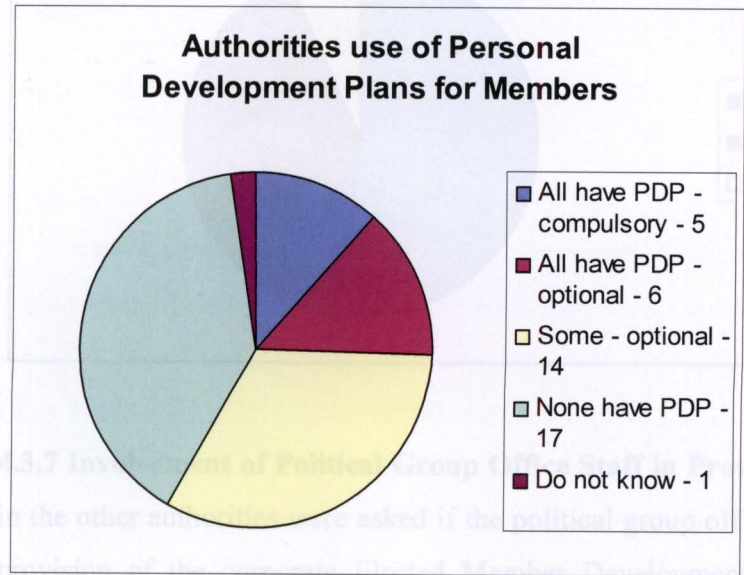
**4.3.5 Personal Development Plans** – respondents in the other authorities were asked whether the members in their authorities have a ‘personal development plan’ drawn up by the local authority. There were five options to this question: five respondents said that all members at their local authority have a PDP as it is compulsory (11.6%); six said all had a PDP although this was optional (14%); fourteen stated that some have a PDP as it is optional (32.6%) - including one where it was stated that nearly all members have one; seventeen stated that no members have a PDP (39.5%) - although three of these stated that they were trying to organize this; and one respondent did not know (2.3%) (figure 8).



In Liverpool some members do have a personal development plan from the corporate member development team but not all members have one.

In interviews the five members in Liverpool all remembered being sent forms regarding learning needs, but did not consider they had formal personal development plans in place. Comments included that these were ‘self-declarations’ rather than assessments. All members felt that the Labour Group itself, not the corporate officers, should set most or all of their development goals. Two members - Cllr J. and Cllr V. - felt some issues could be dealt with by corporate officers whilst other issues could not.

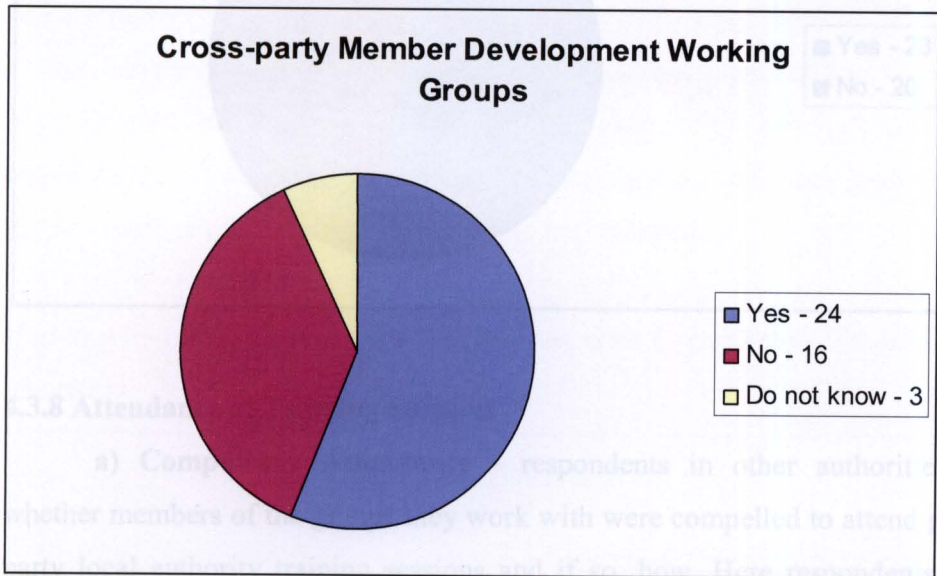
**Figure 8 – Number of Local Authorities with a Proportion of Members with a PDP**



**4.3.6 Cross-party Member Development Groups / Committees** – respondents in other authorities were asked if their authority has a committee or working group where representatives of all parties meet to discuss the corporate member development programme. On this issue 24 respondents said their authority did have such a group (55.8%); sixteen respondents said their authority did not have one (37.2%); and three respondents did not know (7.0%) (figure 9).

Liverpool City Council has had a cross-party member development working group since January 2000. However, of the five Liverpool members interviewed only three knew that Liverpool City Council had a Member Development Working Group (MDWG), and only one member knew which two members of the Labour Group were their representatives on the MDWG, although two other members knew who one of them was.

**Figure 9 – Local Authorities with Cross-Party Member Development Groups**

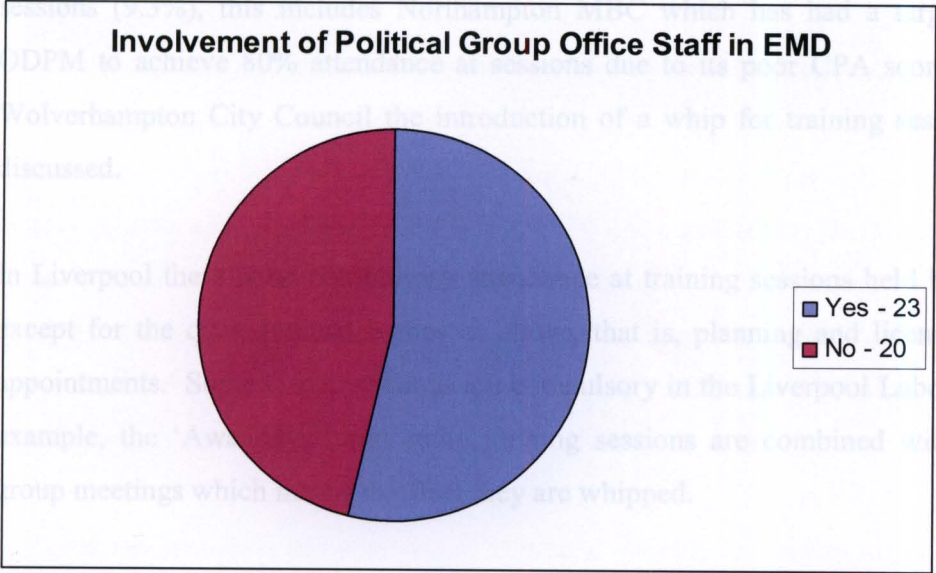


**4.3.7 Involvement of Political Group Office Staff in Provision of EMD** – respondents in the other authorities were asked if the political group office staff were involved in the provision of the corporate Elected Member Development there. 23 respondents said political assistants or other political group staff were involved (53.5%); and 20 said they were not (46.5%); there were no respondents who did not know the answer to this (figure 10).

In Liverpool the staff from the political group support offices have been involved recently in planning the new Council Members’ programme. In interview one member asked for greater involvement of dedicated political group support office staff in assisting the Leader with the personal development plans for group members in particular.



**Figure 10 – Number of Local Authorities with Involvement of Group Office Staff in Member Development**



**Figure 11 – Number of Local Authorities with Compulsory Training Sessions for**

**4.3.8 Attendance at Training Sessions**

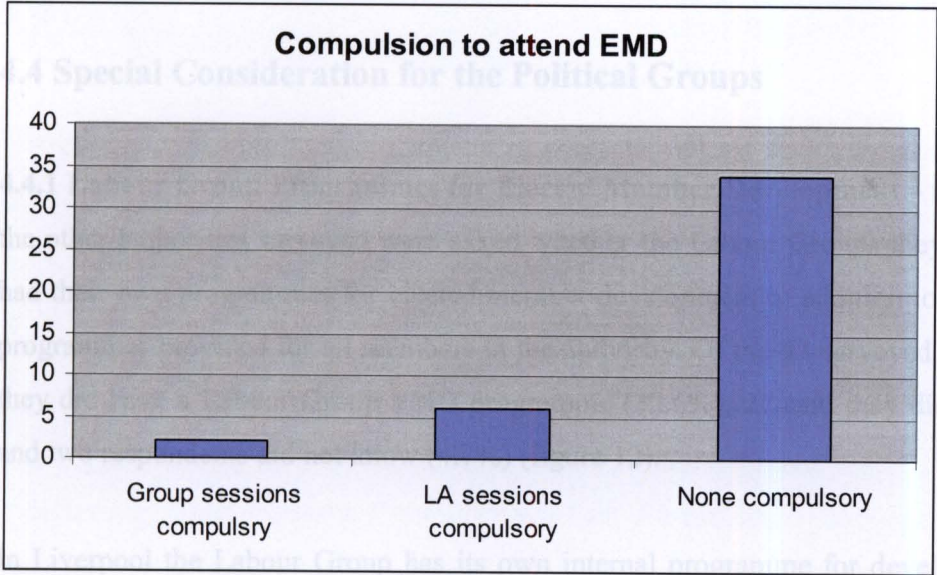
**a) Compulsory Attendance** - respondents in other authorities were asked whether members of the groups they work with were compelled to attend group or cross-party local authority training sessions and if so, how. Here respondents could choose from three options on the questionnaire: first, that members are compelled to attend group sessions, and / or second, that members are compelled to attend local authority sessions; or third, that members are not compelled to attend either group or local authority sessions.

Here only two respondents said members of their group were compelled to attend training sessions held by the group (4.7%); six said they were compelled to attend local authority training (14.0%); and 34 stated that there was no compulsory training (79.1%) except for a few elements of it, for example, for planning, licensing and staff appeals and appointments. In Kirklees there are annual compulsory ‘awaydays’; the London Borough of Lambeth also has whipped group sessions (figure 11).

Where training was compulsory, respondents were also asked how this is enforced. Four respondents specified that their local authority uses a Whip to compel members to attend sessions (9.3%), this includes Northampton MBC which has had a target set by the ODPM to achieve 80% attendance at sessions due to its poor CPA score in 2004. At Wolverhampton City Council the introduction of a whip for training sessions is being discussed.

In Liverpool there is no compulsory attendance at training sessions held by the council except for the quasi-judicial bodies as above, that is, planning and licensing and staff appointments. Some Group sessions are compulsory in the Liverpool Labour Group, for example, the 'Awaydays', and some training sessions are combined with the regular group meetings which means in effect they are whipped.

**Figure 11 – Number of Local Authorities with Compulsory Training Sessions for Members**



**b) Encouragement to Attend Training Sessions** – Respondents in authorities where training is not compulsory were asked whether members are encouraged to attend and if so, how. Again, more than one option could be selected in this question. 26 respondents said members were encouraged to attend group sessions (60.5%); and 32

said members were encouraged to attend LA sessions (74.4%) – respondents could choose either or both of these options.

The form that the encouragement takes is fairly consistent. Only two respondents said there was an attendance allowance specifically for training sessions (4.7%); seventeen said they relied on a combination of reminders and pressure from officers and / or peers and / or whips / business managers (39.5%) to encourage attendance (the words ‘coercion’ and ‘exhortation’ were included here!). In Shropshire County Council members got ‘points’ for attendance and those who achieved a certain level of attendance got publicity for this in the local press. Some local authorities hold sessions prior to all-member meetings, eg City of Westminster Council holds sessions prior to Full Council.

In Liverpool members are encouraged to attend training but are not paid an allowance specifically for attending training as their allowance is supposed to cover all duties.

## **4.4 Special Consideration for the Political Groups**

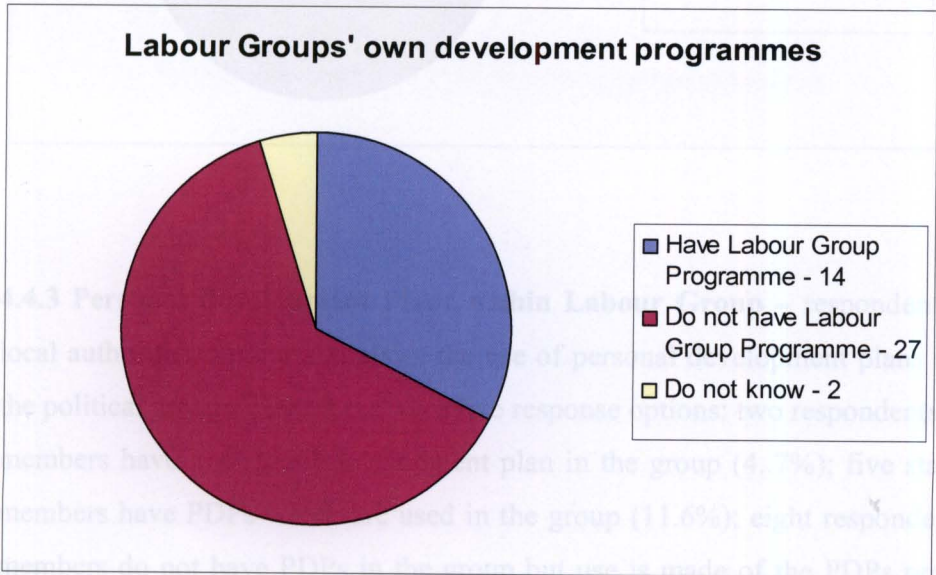
**4.4.1 Labour Group Programmes for Elected Member Development** – respondents in the other authorities surveyed were asked whether the Labour Groups they worked with had their own programmes for elected member development in addition to the corporate programmes provided for all members in the authority. Of the 43 surveyed, fourteen said they did have a Labour Group EMD programme (32.6%); 27 said they did not (62.8%) and two respondents did not know (4.7%) (figure 12).

In Liverpool the Labour Group has its own internal programme for development of its members in addition to members participating in the corporate training. In interviews all members were positive about the training provided within the Labour Group: the three senior members interviewed having all been involved in providing this in some form.



Two members commented on the importance of working together as a group and of “strengthening the relationships within the group”. Two members commented that more training within the group should be undertaken, and made suggestions for this, including Cllr I.’s comments on inducting new members into the council. All five members thought that more development opportunities should be provided by their political party outside of the council, however, on a city-wide or regional basis.

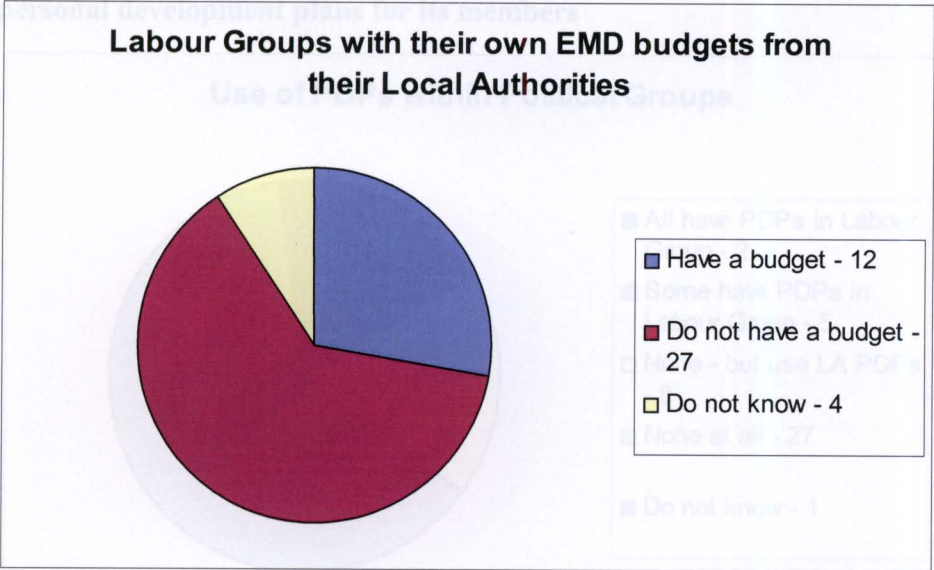
**Figure 12 – Number of Local Authorities where Labour Groups have their own Development Programmes**



**4.4.2 Labour Groups’ Budgets for Development and Training** – respondents in other authorities were asked whether their Labour Groups have a budget for development and training provided by their local authority. The responses were that twelve groups do have a dedicated budget from the LA (30.2%); 27 do not (60.5%) – although Northampton Borough specified that this was being looked into, and Wolverhampton City stated that money is provided on an hoc basis as required; and four respondents did not know (9.3%) (figure 13).

Liverpool City Council does not provide a dedicated budget for the Labour Group (or any political group) to spend on its own development, although this has been discussed.

Figure 13 – Labour Groups with a Development Budget from their Local Authority



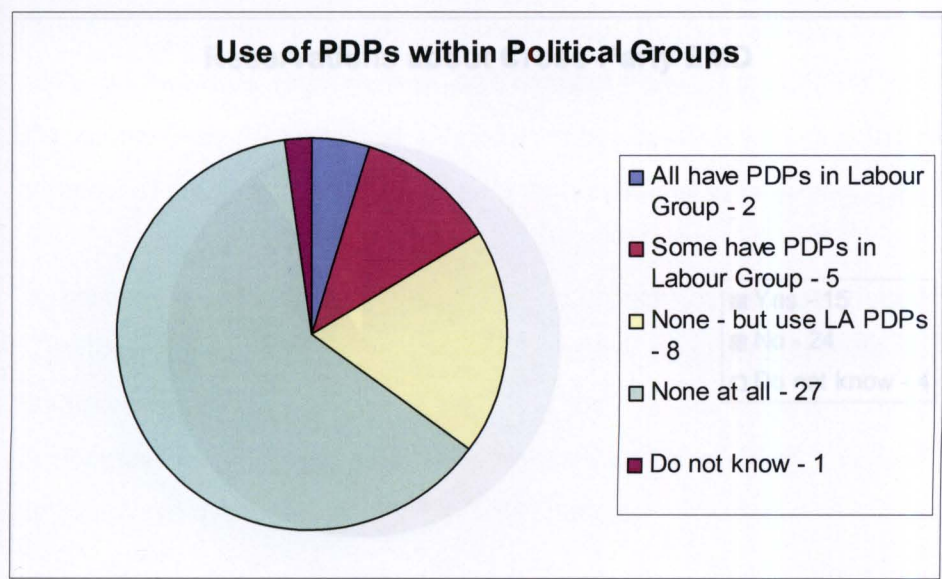
**4.4.3 Personal Development Plans within Labour Group** – respondents in the other local authorities were asked about the use of personal development plans (PDPs) within the political groups. Here there were five response options: two respondents stated that all members have a personal development plan in the group (4.7%); five stated that some members have PDPs which are used in the group (11.6%); eight respondents stated that members do not have PDPs in the group but use is made of the PDPs produced by the local authority (18.6%); 27 stated that none have PDPs in the group (62.8%); and one respondent did not know (2.3%) (figure 14).

The reservations were expressed by Labour Groups who were in opposition in their In Liverpool no Labour Group members have personal development plans within the group although members are asked to fill in a form each year for their Chief Whip on their training needs as part of their application for posts at the annual meeting.

As discussed above, reservations have been expressed at Liverpool City Council and all None of the members interviewed thought that their development needs had been assessed by their political group or by their political party.



**Figure 14 – Number of Local Authorities where the Labour Group makes use of personal development plans for its members**



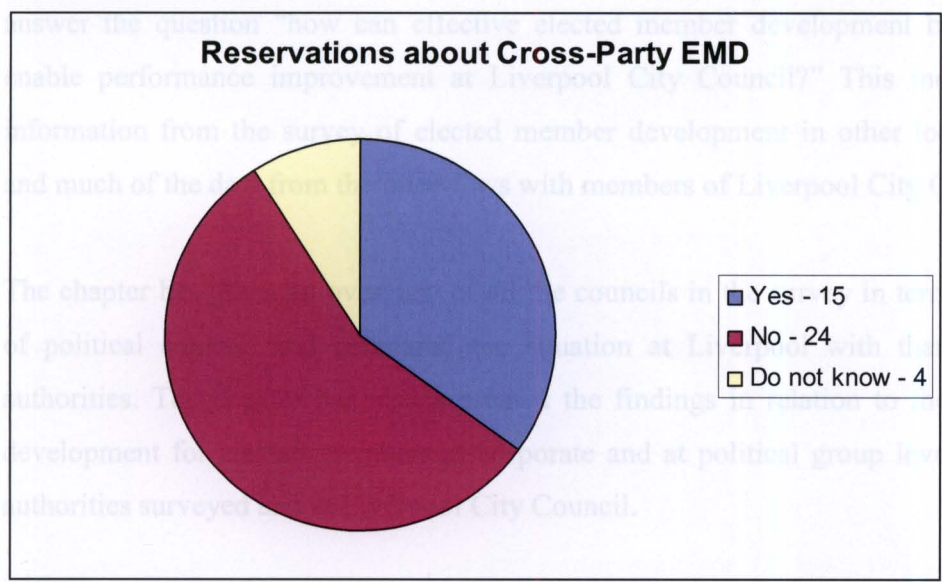
4.4.5 Provision of Separate Training Sessions for different Political Groups –

**4.4.4 Members’ Reservations with regard to Cross-party Elected Member Development** – respondents in the other local authorities were asked whether members at their authorities had expressed reservations about joining with members of other political parties for training sessions. Fifteen respondents said this had been raised as an issue at their authority (34.9%); 24 said it had not (55.9%); and four respondents did not know (9.3%) (figure 15).

The reservations were expressed by Labour Groups who were in opposition in their councils and by Labour Groups in administration, for example at Sheffield City and Basingstoke Borough councils.

As discussed above, reservations have been expressed at Liverpool City Council and all five members interviewed had grave reservations about sharing learning outside of their political group. “Why should I” was the question asked by two members in response to this; “no way” was another response.

**Figure 15 – Local Authorities where Members have expressed reservations about Cross-party Development**



**4.4.5 Provision of Separate Training Sessions for different Political Groups –** respondents in the other authorities were asked if special arrangements are made for the various political groups by their local authorities, for example, holding separate sessions for the different political groups. Fifteen respondents said their authority did so (34.9%); 22 said their authority did not do so (51.2%); and six did not know (14.0%).

In Liverpool there were not normally any special arrangements made by the local authority - one course was provided when asked for but this was an exception. The concerns of the groups have been incorporated into the new Council Members’ Programme to an extent, however.

In interviews members were asked their views on whether mentoring could work across the different political groups but there was opposition to this from all five members. Comments included “cannot have any meaningful application in the context of Liverpool City Council” (Cllr S.); “I have good relationships with the Lib Dems but I know where the ‘cut-off’ point is” (Cllr J.); and “information must remain confidential from political opponents” (Cllr M.).

## 4.5 Summary of Findings

This chapter has presented most of the results of the primary research undertaken to answer the question “how can effective elected member development be provided to enable performance improvement at Liverpool City Council?” This included all the information from the survey of elected member development in other local authorities and much of the data from the interviews with members of Liverpool City Council.

The chapter has given an overview of all the councils in the survey in terms of type and of political control, and compared the situation at Liverpool with that at the other authorities. The chapter has also presented the findings in relation to the provision of development for elected members at corporate and at political group level in the other authorities surveyed and at Liverpool City Council.

Thus the chapter has examined eight main elements of EMD provision at cross-party level and shown:-

- That almost all local authorities surveyed have a cross-party elected member development programme in place, and a corporate budget for this, including Liverpool;
- That there is a variety in the level of resources provided in each local authority for the development of its members, with about half having dedicated staff for this, including Liverpool;
- That no local authority other than Liverpool has an accredited member development course, but that the majority of authorities are signed up to national or regional member development charters, although Liverpool is not;
- That the majority of local authorities have personal development plans in place for at least some members, including Liverpool - although there is evidence that members at Liverpool City Council do not agree that they have these;
- That a large majority of authorities have cross-party member development groups or committees, including Liverpool, but there is some evidence that members at Liverpool are not fully aware of this;



- That just over half of all authorities in the survey involve the staff from the political group support offices in providing development for members, including Liverpool in recent months; and
- That few authorities have compulsory attendance for development sessions (except for the quasi-judicial functions - planning, licensing) but most encourage their members to attend, including Liverpool, and very few authorities pay a specific allowance for attendance at training sessions.

Further, specific issues around political groups have been examined and the research findings have shown that:-

- About one third of authorities have Labour Groups which have their own internal development programmes – including Liverpool, and a slightly smaller number are funded by the authority for this – although not at Liverpool City Council;
- About a third of authorities have Labour Groups where the members have PDPs within the groups, which Liverpool Labour Group does not;
- Just over one-third of authorities have Labour Groups where members have expressed reservations about sharing learning experiences with members of other political groups, including at Liverpool; and
- Just over a third of authorities hold specific sessions for the separate groups provided by the authority to accommodate such concerns - Liverpool City Council has recently begun to incorporate this into its new Council Members' Programme.

The next chapter will now explore the research results further in the context of the literature discussed in Chapter 2, and the research findings will be cross-referenced with performance scores where applicable. Chapter 5 will also examine the situation in Liverpool City Council in more depth, including the situation within the Labour Group.

From this analysis in Chapter 5 it should then be possible to make recommendations on the most effective means of providing development opportunities for councillors to enable performance improvement at Liverpool City Council.

## **5. Conclusions and Implications: How can effective elected member development be provided to enable performance improvement at Liverpool City Council?**

### **5.1 Introduction**

The performance of elected members as governors of local authorities has been identified as a critical factor in overall council performance, and in the performance of Liverpool City Council in particular (ODPM, 2003; LCC, 2005e). The need for development of elected members to ensure their maximum performance has also been clearly identified, and public funding for such development been provided. It is crucial then that the development opportunities be delivered in the most effective way to ensure public value.

The literature reviewed in Chapter 2 suggested that organisations can be improved by the management of the individuals in them, and that learning and development plays a critical part in this. Moreover, the role of elected members as representatives of political parties means their recruitment and selection lies outside the control of the local authorities, thus placing even more importance on learning and development as the means by which performance of members can be managed. The literature identified problems with the delivery of such development opportunities, however, not least members' possible rejection of it or disengagement due to reluctance to share learning experiences with political opponents.

Three main issues emerged from the literature which required further investigation in order to answer the research question above. Thus primary research was planned and undertaken to try to answer a research question in three parts as follows:-

- i. What evidence is there – if any - that elected member development can lead to improved local authority performance;
- ii. How can members' development needs be appraised and development opportunities best be provided whilst ensuring public value; and
- iii. In what ways can development be provided to ensure engagement and a safe learning environment for all councillors?

As discussed in Chapter 3, the research used different approaches, strategies and data collection methods in order to obtain as full a picture as possible of the three parts of the research question being investigated. The research thus included both a survey on elected member development in other local authorities and a case study of the current situation at Liverpool City Council. The findings in Chapter 4 then contained data on the provision of development in the councils surveyed and of members' views of such provision in Liverpool. It is then now necessary to analyse this data to answer the research question.

### **5.1.1 Answering the Three Parts of the Research Question**

i) To answer the first part of the research question the information on provision of development is to be cross-referenced with the performance scores of the surveyed authorities to see if increased development provision is reflected in the improved performance of councils;

ii) To answer the second part of the research question it is necessary to analyse the case study information, including the comments of the members interviewed and the literature on Liverpool City Council, in the light of the cross-referencing. This allows comparison of the situation at Liverpool with the information on performance gathered from the process described above. From this, implications for the provision of 'best practice' development for councillors at Liverpool City Council may be drawn out; and

iii) To answer the third part of the research question it is necessary to conduct examination of the information from both the survey and the case study on the role of the councillors as political representatives and members of political groups, which is highlighted as a crucial factor in the literature. This part of the analysis means that recommendations may be made for 'best practice' development by the political groups, in addition to the recommendations for the local authority as a whole.

Before looking at the conclusions to the three parts of the research question (at 5.3 – 5.5) however, the adopted methodology is evaluated and its limitations discussed below.



## **5.2 Evaluation of Adopted Methodology and its Limitations**

### **5.2.1 ‘Paradigm-hopping’**

One of the main difficulties with the adopted methodology was the use of both deductive and inductive techniques. As discussed above, such ‘paradigm-hopping’ has the advantage of allowing a full investigation into the situation; however, it also presents additional complications with interpreting the data. The interpretation is necessarily complex, requiring separate stages to be undertaken.

Similarly, the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data means additional complexity in interpretation. In particular, the interview questions to members in the second stage of the data collection are necessarily different to the questions sent to the other local authorities in the questionnaire. This means that the interview response data must be re-aligned with the information gathered in each area of investigation by the questionnaire. It does however, permit the ‘triangulation’ discussed in Chapter 3, and the ability to examine the ‘overlap’ of information provided by the different collection methods, as suggested by Jankowicz (2000). The information from the interviews thus supplements the survey responses in many areas of the research and adds ‘rich’ data to the ‘thin abstraction’ provided by the quantitative data (Saunders *et al*, 2003).

### **5.2.2 Measuring Performance**

Another issue with the adopted methodology was the need for accurate information on the performance of the local authorities in order to cross-check the ‘causal relationships between variables’ needed for deductive research (Saunders *et al*, 2003). However, the only easily available statistic on local authority performance is the annual Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) from the Audit Commission. This provides an up-to-date overview of local authority performance, but the CPA score measures overall performance of the council, rather than specific performance in terms of governance.

The CPA scores for 2005 used in this research have the “three elements of annual service assessment, use of resources and a periodic corporate assessment” which are then brought together to give a single category (AC, 2005b). This then is a rather crude measurement

of performance in terms of the roles of elected members: for example, although the CPA score includes a corporate assessment, this is not an annual measurement – in Liverpool’s case the assessment from 2002 was ‘rolled over’ into its 2005 CPA score (LCC, 2005e).

The CPA score is, however, one that can be easily gathered for comparison of a large number of authorities. Further, specific information discussed in Chapter 2 showed that lack of member capacity was closely linked with problems of overall council performance: some of the reasons for Liverpool being awarded only two-stars in its 2005 CPA score, and only the second on a scale of four ‘direction of travel’ categories, included issues where overall performance could be determined by leadership and governance. These included a lack of financial planning in the long- and medium terms and lack of alignment of the use of resources with the council’s ‘Vision and Values’ (2.2.3). Further, concerns for the next corporate assessment included the requirement for a clear community leadership role and for robust performance management if the score was not to fall from the 2005 assessment (LCC, 2005e). Thus the overall CPA score does reflect the performance of elected members as governors of councils to some extent and provides some form of tangible measurement in examining whether EMD is providing ‘public value’.

### **5.2.3 Other Limitations of the Methodology**

Other limitations of the adopted methodology were discussed in Chapter 3 (at 3.5). These included the need for all information to be collected from one political group only, due to issues of access caused by the researcher’s professional role, and the small sample size for the questionnaire, which was not statistically significant. It was explained that this small sample size was due to the need to collect data in a short space of time and from respondents with a shared background. A third limitation was the level of knowledge of the questionnaire respondents: although all respondents were fully cognisant with the sensitivity of the politicians’ role, not all of them were aware of some of the very specific aspects concerning elected member development, for example, around the accreditation of courses and the grades of member development officers in the various authorities.

### **5.3 Conclusions about the 1<sup>st</sup> Research Objective: *What evidence is there – if any - that elected member development can lead to improved local authority performance?***

As discussed, the CPA score provides a readily available source of information on local authority performance. Thus, as described below the local authorities are ranked by their CPA scores and the scores cross-referenced with particular elements in the councils' provision of elected member development, to see if the elements relate to the scores.

As explained at section 4.2.4, not all 43 authorities surveyed had a 2005 CPA score: five only had a score for 2004, and for one authority, no CPA score could be found. Although the assessment process changed in 2005 (to the 'harder test', discussed in at 2.2.2) the scores of the five councils not assessed in 2005 were equated with the nearest 2005 categories for the purpose of this exercise. Thus of the 42 surveyed authorities with a known CPA score there was one authority with no stars; one with one star; eight with two stars; nineteen with three stars and thirteen with four stars, in total.

As shown in Chapter 4 (4.3.1 – 4.3.8) the survey of local authorities identified eight elements of corporate elected member development provision which could be operationalised in order to allow for deductive techniques to be used. These were:- having a cross-party EMD programme; having a corporate EMD budget; having dedicated officers to provide EMD to all members; having external recognition for the EMD provision; the use of personal development plans for members; having a cross-party EMD group or committee; having involvement of political office group staff in the provision of corporate EMD; and having compulsory or highly encouraged attendance at EMD sessions.

The data on these eight elements in each council ranked by CPA score is contained in the tables at Appendix 5. In these calculations any 'don't knows' from the questionnaires have been disregarded, meaning total figures can be different in each section. The cross-referencing applies to only 42 councils in total, as Gwynedd Council has no CPA score. Liverpool is not included in the calculations as it is discussed separately below.

**5.3.1 / 5.3.2 Corporate (Cross-party) Elected Member Development Programmes and Budgets** - Sections 4.3.1 and 4.3.2 looked at whether the local authorities surveyed had a corporate (cross-party) elected member development programme and whether they had a budget for this. Almost all local authorities surveyed - 41 out of 43 - had a cross-party programme and almost all – 41 out of 43 – had a budget for this.

*This universality meant that no relationship between the provision of a cross-party programme or a budget for this and the performance of the authority could be seen, but indicates an assumption by councils that provision of both these elements of EMD will be beneficial to the authority.*

**5.3.3 Officer Support for Elected Member Training and Development** – As seen at section 4.3.3, about half of the authorities surveyed had officers employed specifically to provide elected member development, that is, officers with no other responsibilities: 22 of the authorities had such officers, compared to 20 without. When the information on the presence of these officers is compared to CPA scores, the authorities with higher scores were more likely to have at least one dedicated EMD officer: 66.6% of four-star authorities have dedicated officers for EMD (eight out of twelve); 63.2% of three-star authorities (twelve out of nineteen); but only 20% of authorities with two stars or less have dedicated officers for EMD (two out of ten authorities).

The survey also asked about the number of officers employed in each authority. When the information on the number of elected member development officers in each authority is cross-referenced with the CPA scores, the authorities with higher scores are more likely to have more dedicated EMD officers: 0.82 officers on average in four-star authorities; 0.91 in three-star authorities; and 0.3 officers on average in those authorities with two or less stars. The survey also asked about the grades of the officers employed to provide the EMD as the level of the post(s) could be significant in terms of the officer being able to influence the development provision. However, it was not possible to gather sufficient data on this as most respondents did not know the grades, or they were not on comparable scales in the different authorities: only five authorities – all three and four-

star authorities - stated a meaningful grade: of these all were lower to middle 'principal officer' grades (PO2 – 5).

*Thus it is possible to see a positive relationship between provision of dedicated EMD officers and the performance of the authority, as the presence of dedicated officers is connected to higher levels of performance. It is not possible to see clearly how the level of officer reflects on this, however, due to lack of data.*

**5.3.4 Recognition / Accreditation of Member Development Courses** – none of the authorities in the survey have courses that are formally accredited although three are closely linked with academic institutions. However, 28 authorities are signed up to the 'Charter for Member Development' from the Improvement and Development Agency and / or their Regional Employers' Organisation (as shown at 4.3.4).

When cross-referenced with the CPA scores 80% of four-star authorities were signed up to the charter or linked to another academic institution (eight out of ten); 77.8% of the three-star authorities are signed up to their IDeA / EO Member Development Charter(s) (fourteen out of eighteen); and 77.8% of authorities with two stars or less are signed up (seven out of nine).

*Thus no clear relationship between recognition of courses and performance of local authorities could be seen, but the highest performers are very slightly more likely to have external recognition of their EMD programme.*

**5.3.5 Personal Development Plans** – In over half of the authorities surveyed (25) some or all members had Personal Development Plans; in 12 authorities all members had PDPs (as shown at 4.3.5). When the information on personal development plans is cross-referenced with local authority CPA scores it indicates that in 76.9% of four-star authorities members have PDPs (ten out of thirteen); in 57.9% of three-star authorities members have PDPs (eleven out of nineteen); and 44.4% of authorities with two or less stars use PDPs for their members (four out of nine).

*Thus more of the higher-rated authorities use personal development plans for their members. This seems to indicate that there is a positive relationship between this element of elected member development and better local authority performance.*

**5.3.6 Cross-party Member Development Groups / Committees** – As shown at section 4.3.6, over half of the local authorities surveyed (24) had a cross-party member development working group to discuss the provision of development in the authority. When cross-referenced with the authorities' CPA scores there was little difference between the higher and lower performing authorities in relation to having member development working groups, in fact the lowest performing authorities were slightly more likely to have one: 58.3% of four-star authorities had such a group (seven out of twelve); 52.6% of three star authorities have one (ten out of nineteen); and 66.6% of authorities with two or less stars did so (six out of nine).

*This element of elected member development does not have a clear relationship with the authorities' performance scores, indeed more of the lowest-rated authorities have a member development working group, although the middle-rated authorities are the least likely to have one.*

**5.3.7 Involvement of Political Group Office Staff in Provision of EMD** – Just over half of the authorities surveyed (23) have their group office staff involved in the provision of corporate elected member development (not just the political group's own development), as shown at section 4.3.7. When cross-referenced with the CPA scores, there did appear to be a higher level of involvement of group office staff in corporate elected member development in the higher performing authorities – 69.2% in four-star authorities (nine out of thirteen); 47.4% in three-star authorities (nine out of nineteen); and 40% of authorities with two stars or less have group office staff involved in corporate EMD (four out of ten).

*There does then seem to be a positive relationship between this element of elected member development and better local authority performance.*

**5.3.8 Attendance at Training Sessions** – The final element of corporate elected member development identified in the survey was compulsory or encouraged attendance at development sessions, this is shown at section 4.3.8. Few authorities (6) have compulsory attendance at corporate training events, except for the quasi-judicial functions which are compulsory for members (planning, licensing, and staff appeals and appointments). Further, most authorities (32) give general encouragement to members to attend authority sessions in the absence of compulsion, although only two authorities pay an allowance for attendance at sessions. Two authorities make particular attempts to encourage attendance by the timing of the events and by other rewards.

When cross-referenced with CPA scores, the four authorities that encourage attendance by rewards - including allowances – are four-star authorities (30.8%) (four out of thirteen); only 1 three star authority has compulsory attendance (5.3% - one out of nineteen); and two with two or less stars do so (22.2% - two out of nine). However this statistic is skewed as one of the lowest-rated authorities with compulsory attendance is Northampton Borough Council – a ‘no-star’ authority where there is a minimum 80% attendance target set for training by the ODPM recently because of the authority’s poor overall performance – this then has been externally directed as a result of poor performance.

*It would appear then that there is some positive link between attendance at training sessions and performance scores as the four-star authorities are more likely to pay for or encourage this – and clearly this is the view of the ODPM.*

**5.3.9 Summary of 1<sup>st</sup> Research Objective Conclusions:** *What evidence is there – if any - that elected member development can lead to improved local authority performance?*

All eight identified elements of cross-party elected member development provision have been cross-referenced with the performance scores of the local authorities in the survey. When the cross-referencing was undertaken a positive relationship between the level of EMD provision and the CPA score was found in five of the identified elements, whilst no

clear relationship could be found in the other three elements. There is no evidence that providing elected member development has any negative effect on local authority performance. Thus the authorities with higher CPA scores did have higher levels of provision in terms of the authorities:-

- having dedicated EMD officers;
- having externally recognised courses;
- using personal development plans for their members;
- having the political group support office staff involved in EMD provision; and
- having compulsory, or encouraging, attendance.

Meanwhile almost all authorities have an EMD programme and have a budget for this – reflecting assumptions that such elements must be beneficial; and in the case of the cross-party working groups, no clear relationship could be seen.

There is, however, no evidence that the higher scores are caused by the development of members, as higher performing councils could provide more councillor development – thus the additional resources for EMD could be the result of higher performance scores rather than the cause of it. This research reflects the literature examined in Chapter 2 (2.2.7) where central and local government have identified the need for member development and make funds available for it in order to improve performance of authorities (IDeA, 2006; ODPM, 2003, LCC 2000).

The results of this part of the research also reflect the literature on organisational performance and human resource development which place emphasis on learning and development as part of managing individual performance in order to improve organisational performance (Boxall & Purcell, 2003; Bach & Sissons, 2000). The importance of this is increased due to the absence of input at the recruitment and selection stage which is normally considered crucial to performance management within organisations (Leach *et al*; 1994; Goss, 2001; Clarke & Stewart, 1996), which is discussed further at 5.5 below.



## **5.4 Conclusions about the 2<sup>nd</sup> Research Objective: *How can the development needs of members be appraised and development opportunities best be provided whilst ensuring public value at Liverpool City Council?***

If, as shown in the analysis of the research above, providing elected member development relates to better overall performance, it is important now to examine the situation at Liverpool City Council. In Liverpool elected member development is provided, and has been since 2000, but issues of performance are currently of concern. All eight of the identified elements that contribute to EMD provision in local authorities – including the five elements which relate to higher performance - are present at Liverpool City Council, but no benefit to the authority is being seen in improving performance.

Indeed, as discussed in Chapter 2, Liverpool's Comprehensive Assessment score appears to have worsened between 2004 and 2005, being assessed as only two stars in 2005, having been assessed as 'good' in 2004, the equivalent of three stars. The 'direction of travel' for the improvement was also only assessed as level two – 'improving adequately' – on a scale of one to four. Certainly Liverpool's position has changed from being one of the fastest improving councils, as it was between 1999 and 2003. As discussed in Chapter 2 (2.2.3 – 2.2.6), issues of governance have been of concern recently, including problems highlighted in the CPA (LCC, 2005e), in the report on the Scheme of Delegation (AC, 2005a), and in the report on 'City-Regions' (Marshall & Finch, 2006).

It is important then to discover if there are any issues particular to Liverpool which mean the elected member development provided is not benefiting the authority, especially as public funds are allocated for this. As discussed at 2.3.1, it is particularly important that such development is beneficial, as the range of human performance increases as job complexity does (Boxall & Purcell, 2003), and the councillor role is complex (IDeA, 2004a). Thus below the information gathered from the case study on Liverpool City Council is compared with the results of the cross-referencing analysis on the identified elements of EMD as above. This section examines how members' development needs are being appraised and development opportunities provided at Liverpool, in order to see what action can be taken to improve the current outcomes of the development provision.

**5.4.1 / 5.4.2 Corporate (Cross-Party) Elected Member Development Programme and Budget** – almost all local authorities in the survey had a corporate EMD programme and budget, which meant no particular effects on council performance of the existence of a programme could be seen. It does however indicate an assumption across local government that funding development for all elected members brings benefit to the local authority. As discussed in Chapter 2 (2.4.1) Liverpool City Council established the funding and the organisational structure to provide a Member Development Programme in 2000 (LCC, 2000a; LCC, 2001). This structure included officer support (see 5.4.3) and the mechanism for regular elected member input in the form of the Member Development Working Group (see 5.4.5). Councillor Fielding, then Executive Member with responsibility for training, said at the ‘Community, Equality and Values Select Committee’ in 2000 that “members’ development and equipping members with the skills to do the job was a key element of the Council’s modernizing agenda” (LCC, 2000a). The EMD budget was £30,000 for the 2004 - 05 municipal year, excluding staff costs.

Some aspects of the development programme progressed well and it was commended in the ‘Municipal Journal Annual Awards’ 2004 for the development work undertaken 2003-04 (MJ, 2004). Subsequently, however, training sessions were cancelled and many poorly attended: the performance indicator for the service – that all members attend two or more sessions - was not met for 2004-05 (LCC, 2005c), which led to the decision to reconstruct the programme (LCC, 2005b). Thus in November 2005 the modular Liverpool Council Members Programme (LCMP) was launched, accredited by the University of Chester. Consisting of eight modules, four ‘basic’ and four ‘advanced’, completion of the course can lead to a Certificate in Higher Education level qualification. The content and delivery of this are still being finalised, written by a working group of officers and academics; there is an attempt to focus on members as learners and the course features experiential learning and group work (LCC, 2005b).

The programme is still in the early stages as members have only fully completed one module. Take-up has been initially good with 27 members registering for the first module, although only 12 members have handed in work to gain credits for this. The

‘Members’ Satisfaction Survey’ in April 2006 showed that of 21 members (of all political groups) who expressed a view six were ‘very satisfied’ with the training course; eleven members were ‘fairly satisfied’; and four were neither ‘satisfied nor dissatisfied’. No member said they were ‘dissatisfied’ or ‘very dissatisfied’, although 25 members who completed this survey did not state a preference at all (LCC, 2006b).

The Liverpool Council Members’ Programme has now been short-listed for the Municipal Journal’s ‘Member Development Achievement Award’ for 2006. This award is sponsored by the IDeA who state that “skilled and motivated members are essential to the running of a successful local authority” and that the IDeA “seek to deliver improvement as the outcome of everything we do” (MJ, 2006). It is not, however, clear how the IDeA will measure the outcome of member development programmes, although they state they will be looking for practical examples of how communities have benefited from the member development when judging the award.

**Members’ views:-** Four of the five members interviewed had registered for the LCMP, but only two were progressing with trying to gain the credits for this. Cllr S. claimed to be ‘not interested’ in participating in corporate training, although this member was happy to assist other colleagues with their work on the programme; Cllr J. was ‘frustrated’ by this and other corporate training. Both Cllrs S. and J. are senior members and are qualified to Masters degree level already, however. The fifth member interviewed did not have time for the course due to work and family commitments.

There was a concern that Labour members in particular had less time for training as their ward duties were more time-consuming than the Liberal Democrat members, who tend to be members for the more affluent, suburban wards in the city. Cllr I. says finding the time for the EMD programme is “stressful if your role as a councillor is already very demanding...as a member in a deprived ward”. Cllr J. similarly says “I am under too much other pressure as a councillor. I do not have two to three hours to sit in a workshop”. Certainly all five members have wards with very high levels of economic and social deprivation, indeed they are some of the most deprived wards in the UK.

The theory that elected member development can lead to performance improvement for the local authority is not a view comprehensively shared by the members interviewed, however. The five elected members at Liverpool City Council had mixed views on whether the Liverpool Council Members Programme could help improve the city council's performance. Three members thought it might have a positive effect; however two members stated that it was not likely to do so: "doubt it will in practice" and this "is a bit idealistic – politics will get in the way" were the comments here. The mixed views on EMD leading to improved council performance did not mean that members saw no value in development, however. There was a far more positive response to the question of whether EMD could help constituents – all five members believed this would have a beneficial effect on their constituents, or at least that it "cannot have a negative effect" (Cllr M.). All five also believed it could have a positive effect on their political group in terms of team-building and sharing learning, as well as a positive effect on "encouraging community activists to stand and become councillors in the future" (Cllr J.).

**5.4.3 - Officer Support for Elected Member Training and Development** – the evidence at 5.3.3 above implies a positive relationship between performance and the presence of dedicated officers for EMD in local authorities, and also the number of such officers. Liverpool City Council is officially supposed to have one officer employed to provide member development currently, plus a researcher. The structure established for providing the EMD at Liverpool City Council in 2001 provided for three officers, however – two to work on member development (one officer at PO4/5 grade, plus an assistant) plus a researcher for cross-party member support (LCC, 2001). However, when the PO4/5 officer left in 2003, this post was not replaced at this level, but with an officer at a lower grade only. Further, the intended separate identity of the unit was not maintained, the service merging into the main committee services team. Due to long-term sick leave there is at present only the researcher to provide both the research and the elected member development service.

This element of elected member development has been shown to have a positive relationship with performance so it is of concern that the unit for providing EMD has not

been maintained at the level envisaged when it was set up. Although the average number of EMD officers is only 0.88 in the higher performing authorities, as can be seen from the figures at 4.2.3, the number of councillors in Liverpool is larger than the average council, indicating a need for a higher than average number of officers to provide this. Clarke and Stewart (1996) drew attention for the need for a 'similar approach' to the development of members as to the officer side, and the 2003 report from the ODPM noted the lack of resources for member training compared with that for senior officers. Within the City Council there is a Learning and Development Team for the staff, yet this expertise has not been utilised for the Member Development Programme, where a combination of expertise in both learning and development and working with elected members would be beneficial. Further, national expertise has not been drawn on to a great extent.

**5.4.4 Recognition / Accreditation of Member Development Courses** – a very slight positive relationship can be seen between external recognition of EMD courses and council performance. As described above, Liverpool City Council's course is accredited by University of Chester but this has only been in place for a short time and no member has yet had the opportunity to complete the course and gain the full qualification. Liverpool City Council is not currently signed up to the North West Employers' Organisation or the IDeA 'Charter for Member Development', however, despite agreeing to sign up to the NWEO Charter in 2000 (LCC, 2000b). Liverpool took the decision to leave the North West Employers' Organisation completely in 2004 (LCC, 2004c).

As discussed in Chapter 4 (4.3.4) the members interviewed had mixed views on the importance of the Council Members' Programme being accredited. Three members said this did not affect their view of the course either way (although two of these were seeking to gain credits) and two members believed it was a good idea – Cllr M. says that accreditation "gives it status", but is not registered on the course. Indeed, none of the three academically well-qualified members have registered to gain credits, although two expressly offered to assist others in the Labour Group to do so. All three of these members have their own strategies for meeting their development needs, however, Cllr M. making use of development opportunities through his professional work, and both Cllr

J. and Cllr S. stated the importance of attending conferences. Cllr J. says “I attend conferences and make my own support networks”; Cllr S. says there should be more regional events for councillors within the Labour Party.

Although there is recognition for Liverpool’s EMD course through accreditation from the University of Chester, this does not preclude the council signing up to one of the charters as well. There does not seem to be any clear reason for Liverpool City Council to have disaffiliated from the NWEQ, other than cost. Affiliating to a charter would seem to be advantageous given the stated importance of regional and national connections for the more senior members, for whom a qualification at HE certificate level may not seem desirable. Signing up to a member development charter could connect Liverpool’s training with that of other authorities and help ideas to be exchanged. Alternatively, it has been suggested that the LCMP could be extended to the other local authorities on Merseyside in order to share learning opportunities with members from these authorities. This could keep costs down, and create more diverse learning experiences. As discussed in Chapter 2, reflection is an important part of adult learning, as in Kolb’s cycle. Goss (2001) notes the need for the ‘stimulus of difference’ to help people change.

**5.4.5. Personal Development Plans** – the cross-referencing above at 5.3.5 shows that there is a positive relationship between members having PDPs as part of their development and performance at local authorities. In Liverpool some members do have PDPs from the corporate EMD officer, however this is optional and not all members have them. PDPs were instigated with the Member Development Programme when the new role descriptions and specifications in relation to post-Local Government Modernisation Act were approved in April 2000 and “used as the basis for the identification of training and development needs”, and it was decided that “personal development plans be prepared in consultation with individual members and based on the role descriptions” (LCC, 2000b). All members at Liverpool were offered a ‘training needs’ assessment when they were elected until this year, and at November 2004, fourteen members out of 27 in the Labour Group had had some form of plan drawn up at some stage, although four of these were apparently in need of updating at that time.

All officers at Liverpool City Council are supposed to have a PDP which is linked to their team and service plans (LCC 2004a). However, as stated at 4.3.5, the appraisals of members that have been undertaken are considered by members to be 'self-declarations'. This reflects Bee et al (2003) who point to problems with using appraisal for needs analysis; and to James (2005) who points to the lack of training for managers in identifying learning needs. With the sickness absence of the dedicated member development officer, the new members elected in May have not been offered an assessment. The new Liverpool Councillorship Programme aims to encourage the use of personal development plans where members set out their learning goals in consultation with their tutors. Again, these focus on self-assessed needs and are not linked to the political groups or leaders.

**Members' Views:-** All five members interviewed believe at least some of their learning goals should be set by the leader of their group, with two members stating that they believe there is also a role for corporate officers to set some goals for other areas of their work. "Some information needs to remain within the group" (Cllr S.) seemed to be the general view of all five members. This reflects Goss (2001) and Clarke and Stewart (1996), who point to elected members allegiance being to their political group, not the local authority. The use of PDPs within the group is also discussed below (5.5.5).

Despite considering that they do not actually have a PDP, four of the five members interviewed had a very clear understanding of how their work contributes to the City Council. In particular the three senior members interviewed had well-developed ideas for strategic-level input with officers for service delivery and with the political process. Four members had a clear idea how their work contributed to their political group, and all five had clear ideas of how their work contributed to their political party and to their constituents and the wider community: Cllr J. says "I feed information both from the Labour Party to the community and vice versa. I have to have sensitivity to low literacy, low self-esteem, and social exclusion in the ward". The evidence on personal development plans above implies they relate to improved performance so they need to be dealt with effectively at Liverpool. In the London Borough of Haringey members are

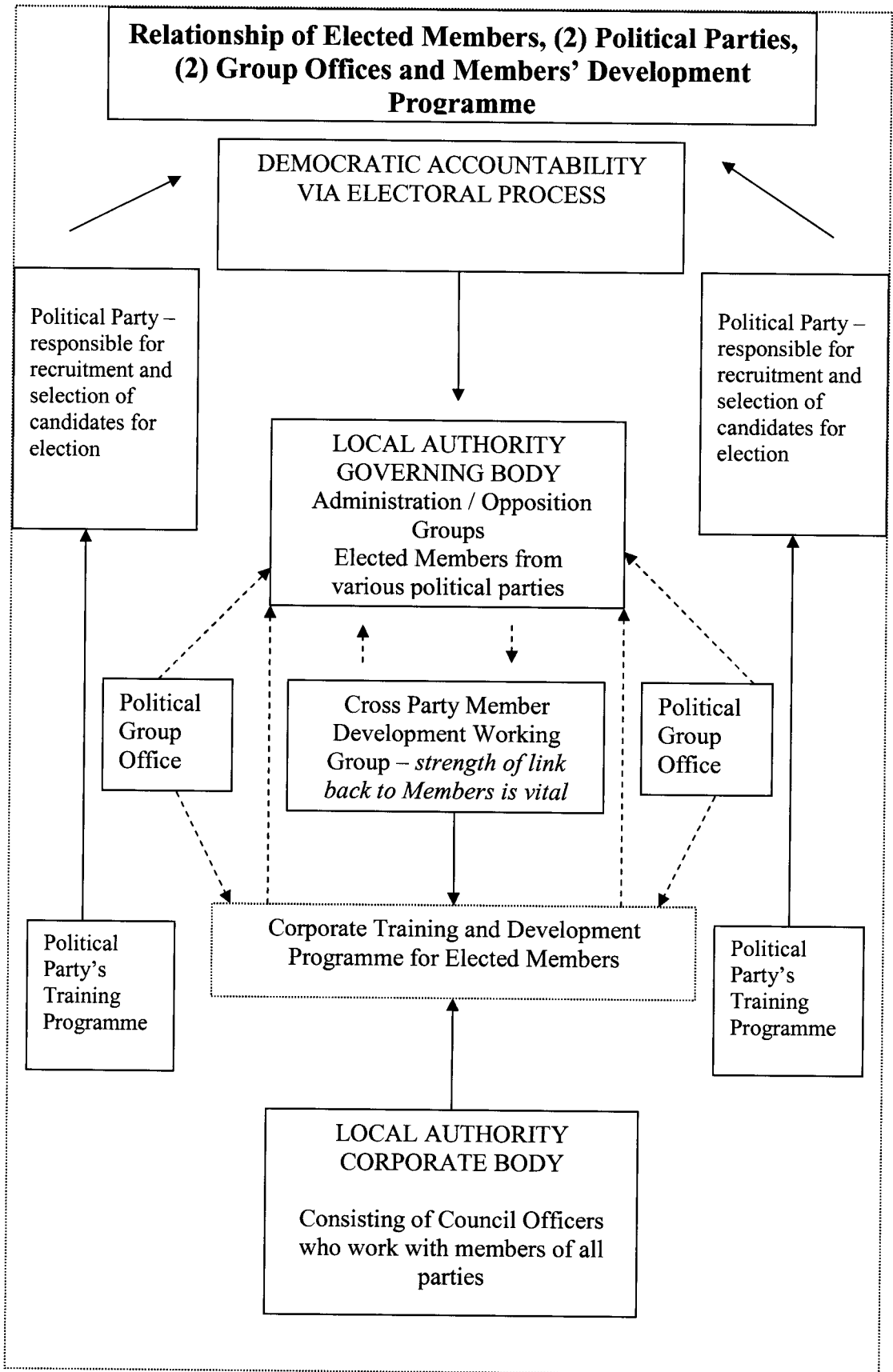
interviewed by the IDeA, not officers from the council, to help set PDPs (IDeA, 2006). Clearly at Liverpool there is little confidence that members' PDPs can be dealt with entirely by corporate officers, and members feel if they are to have a plan, the goals in it must relate to their political group as well as the council. However, there is currently a lack of joined-up work between the corporate EMD team and the political groups.

**5.4.6 Cross-party Member Development Groups / Committees** – As shown at section 5.3.6 there is no clear link between member development groups and local authority performance. Liverpool City Council has such a group which was set up in 2000 “to oversee and assist the development of members training, and report back upon the progress” to the Select Committee. The group consisted of officers and members, and had representatives from all political groups (LCC, 2000b). However, the membership of this committee was not kept up to date: in September 2004 the Shadow (Labour) Executive Board did not know the Opposition Group was represented on this body (LCC, 2004e).

Although the evidence from the CPA scores does not indicate such a committee is a critical factor in EMD provision, the members interviewed expressed concern at the lack of consultation on training, with four of the five members interviewed saying they believed they were not consulted on the training provided at the council. As shown at 4.3.6, only three members knew that the council has a member development group, and only one knew who the two Labour representatives on the group were, although two other knew who one of them was. Cllr S. says there is a need for consultation at group level, in addition to individually. Cllr J. said the council was “low on Arnstein’s ‘ladder of participation’” – that is, members are sent information on training available, but not actually involved in deciding what this should be.

The literature discussed in Chapter 2 (2.3.2 – 2.3.5) indicates the complex relationship that members have as representatives of political parties and as governors of the local authority (Goss, 2001; Wheeler, 2005a). The diagram below (figure 16) indicates the relationship between the political parties outside the council, the political groups inside the council, and the officers responsible for providing services to the members.





As can be seen, the member development committee could form the bridge between corporate officers and councillors in planning and promoting EMD. It could be used as the crucial link between members who have an interest in the development of their colleagues and themselves and the officers who can provide this. Cllr Yates drew attention to the need for a 'political champion' for training in local authorities (Lancs LP, 2006), and one of the other finalists in the Municipal Journal's 'Member Development Awards', Staffordshire County Council, state that their council leader is their 'member development champion'. In Liverpool the MDWG could provide a forum for such a 'development champion' and raise the profile of learning and development for members.

**5.4.7 Involvement of Political Group Office Staff in Provision of EMD** – the evidence from the cross-referencing of the CPA scores above shows a positive relationship between the political group office staff being involved with the provision of the cross-party EMD and improved performance in the local authorities surveyed (5.3.7). At Liverpool City Council the staff from the political group support offices have been involved in planning the Liverpool Members Council Programme since July 2005, although in the past they have not been involved in the provision of the cross-party EMD.

There is little in the literature relating to the role of the political group office staff other than general mentions of 'support' (Martin, 1997). The diagram above indicates the location of the political group office staff who form a bridge between the politicians and the cross-party officers. Support office staff can connect the politicians to the cross-party EMD provision in that they are able to plan diaries whilst understanding the rhythms of the political groups. In the past in Liverpool cross-party training has been booked at times the Labour Group members could not attend, when simple liaison with the group office staff could have prevented this.

Political group office staff have daily contact with members, in particular with the senior members of the groups. As discussed below, one of the means of encouraging attendance at training, used by the majority of councils, is sending reminders from the group office, as well as the Whip or business manager, to remind members to attend.

Elected members do not see the concepts of ‘member development’ and ‘member support’ as mutually exclusive concepts, although Liverpool City Council has separated these for convenience in providing these services. When asked how they could be assisted to improve their practice, two of the five members interviewed referred to elements of ‘support’ rather than learning and development – Cllr S. requesting additional personal staff support; Cllr M. requesting additional help with casework by group office staff. This is reflected in the IDeA who say members should be given “outstanding ongoing support and training” (MJ, 2006). The political group office staff can play a role as communicators between members, many of whom are not physically in the council buildings most days, and much of the local authority. Thus communication can be improved in relation to EMD by cooperative working and more effective use of resources already provided by the local authority, without requiring more funding.

**5.4.8 Attendance at Training Sessions** – the evidence at 5.3.8 shows that the highest performing authorities had the greatest likelihood of having compulsory or paid attendance at training sessions. In Liverpool there is no compulsion to attend corporate development sessions (except the quasi-judicial functions where members must be trained before serving on committees including planning and staff appointments), although this is encouraged by the whips and reminders sent from the group office as well as the corporate EMD officer. There is some compulsion to attend some internal Labour group training – discussed below (5.5).

The ‘standing orders’ of the Liverpool Labour Group state that all Labour members “accept a responsibility to take up such opportunities of training and development that may be provided by the council or the group or the party, in order better to carry out their activities as effective and influential councillors” (LP 2006). Membership of the ‘Association of Labour Councillors’ (ALC), compulsory for all Labour councillors throughout the UK, also includes a commitment that members take up opportunities for training, and advises members to ask for opportunities if none are provided (ALC, 2005). Thus it is expected by their party that Labour members will participate in development opportunities once elected to represent the Labour Party.

At Liverpool Council an allowance was paid in the past for attending training when members were paid per meeting attended (however, there is anecdotal evidence that some members used to sign in and then not complete the training session under this system). Sessions are held prior to Full Council meetings occasionally to try to make them accessible, but these are not popular with senior opposition members who have much preparation work for the council meeting. Further many members attend Full Council after a day in their paid jobs and then have to attend a long evening meeting.

Payment at a higher rate for being a ‘qualified’ councillor was discussed when the new LMCP was being set up. Councillor Mike Storey, then Leader of Liverpool City Council said in July 2005 that there was a need to “empower local councillors” and that he was intending paying extra allowances to members if they obtained the qualification (MJ, 2005). It is not possible to pay additional allowances on the basis of qualification, at present, however, allowances being for attendance and for special responsibilities only. There is at present no clear link between becoming qualified and being promoted to a more senior position, and hence receiving a higher allowance. No member interviewed referred to any financial incentive, or lack of one, in relation to training. Indeed, the interviewees were all willing to become mentors without an additional allowance for this.

Concerns of interviewees were instead around the lack of time for attending sessions and completing the work required for submission to gain credits for the modules. Most members feel inundated with meetings and other duties, which may be in addition to full-time paid work (LCC, 2006b). As discussed in Chapter 2, members cannot be made to attend training by officers: Goss says there is ‘little to encourage’ members to develop, and ‘nothing to force them’ (2001). As discussed above, members believe their learning goals need to be set by their political group leader (5.4.5). Members training is not ‘joined-up’ in that it does not relate directly to areas that leaders – their ‘managers’ – may want for them. Without this, for many members, development sessions can be seen as yet another meeting they do not have time to attend. The only financial issue of concern to members was being able to access funds for attending conferences and other development events in a straightforward way, which can be tied to meaningful PDPs.

**5.4.9 Summary of 2<sup>nd</sup> Research Objective Conclusions:** *How can the development needs of members be appraised and development opportunities best be provided whilst ensuring public value?*

Liverpool City Council set up a member development programme with dedicated staff, a budget for training, and a member development committee before many other authorities did so, but has encountered difficulty in delivery of development subsequently. At the same time, there has been criticism of the governance of the council and lack of capacity of members. Thus a positive relationship between provision of EMD and performance improvement is not currently apparent at Liverpool City Council.

To discover how the development needs of members can be appraised and development opportunities best be provided whilst ensuring public value at Liverpool the case study information has been examined in the context of the conclusions on performance in 5.3 above. This examination has revealed that changes need to be made in some of the identified elements of EMD provision if they are to better contribute to improvement at Liverpool. This study points to some of the changes needed if Liverpool is to make the most of public resources for member development. The case study analysis showed that changes needed include:-

- dealing with problems of lack of engagement with the programme, especially for well-qualified members for whom accreditation to Higher Education Certificate level may not be a motivating factor, but also for members for whom such a level may be too demanding;
- consideration for how newly elected members will be able to join the programme, and for the engagement of the majority of members who have not yet been involved with any of the modules;
- consideration for conducting evaluation of the impact of the accredited course given the resources spent on it;
- drawing on available expertise from other service areas in the City Council, such as the Learning and Development Team, and from national organisations dealing with EMD such as the IDEa and Political Skills Forum, to help write and deliver the remainder of the modules for the LCMP;

- ensuring resources comparable with the senior management team are provided for members, including reasonable access to funds for members to attend conferences and development opportunities outside the council, such as regional training at NWEO where contact with members from other authorities can be made;
- ensuring a sufficient level of officer support is provided, at an appropriately senior level, in a dedicated unit in the City Council; and that the funds intended for this are ring-fenced to ensure officer support can continue to be provided;
- changes in the way appraisal of members' training needs is undertaken, and closer working with the political groups on this, to include providing training for Whips or other senior members on conducting performance review of their group members;
- creating a more 'joined-up' approach between corporate EMD and the political groups to support leaders in their development of their groups;
- looking at the lack of regional member development charter recognition, and / or at working with other councils on a sub-regional level, to broaden input to members' development;
- changes in the promotion of development to members, and better use of existing channels for delivering this, including a higher profile for the Member Development Working Group, and effective liaison and co-operative working with the political group support office staff;
- creation of a 'Members' Development Champion' at an suitably senior level within each of the political groups; and
- creating a culture where development is valued and sufficiently prioritised, to help ensure good attendance at sessions.

There are thus aspects of all the eight identified EMD elements that can be modified or expanded to allow development to be provided more effectively, largely by better use of existing resources and thus without additional funds being required. There is a need for a suitable number of dedicated staff to provide development for 90 members, however, which was already agreed by the council several years ago, and consequently funding for this was agreed also. Recommendations from this analysis are in Chapter 6.

## **5.5 Conclusions about the 3<sup>rd</sup> Research Objective: *In what ways can development be provided to ensure engagement and a safe learning environment for all councillors?***

The section above (5.4) has examined how development can best be provided for elected members at Liverpool City Council by comparing the current situation at Liverpool with the earlier examination of development provision at other local authorities (5.3). The first part of the analysis had indicated a positive relationship between some elements of development provision and council performance, and these elements were analysed further in the light of the specific situation at Liverpool City Council to examine why member development provision there is not currently fully effective. The analysis of the Liverpool case study conducted to answer the second part of the research question has thus led to several suggestions for changes to the way cross-party, corporate development is provided at the City Council for all elected members.

As discussed in Chapter 2, however, the nature of the adversarial political system as well as the role of the political parties in recruitment and selection of elected members means that, however well provided, corporate cross-party EMD can never of itself be sufficient to meet all the development needs of members (Goss, 2001; Clarke & Stewart, 1996). From the interviews undertaken in this study it is clear that members see that their political careers depend on appraisal by their group leader, not by council officers. All nominations for positions on the local authority – including for the most senior councillor positions - are managed by the leaders of the groups via the Whip system. Development within the political groups must then be important to member development overall, as it impacts on the governance and performance of the council. Further, development of the groups is essential to the democratic process, as the policies and capacity of the political groups determines the direction and leadership of the local authority. Wheeler (2005a) points to an ‘understandable nervousness’ in local government about party politics. Whilst promotion to senior roles within groups may not be a purely meritocratic process – leaders will build teams on political loyalty as well as on members’ expertise – its impact on council capacity means that internal group development cannot be ignored by local authorities because of fears it is a ‘party political’ issue.

In Chapter 4 elements of elected member development specific to the political groups were identified within the primary research undertaken and information sought on these from the local authorities in the survey. These elements include whether the group has its own dedicated development programme; whether the group receives a budget from the authority for internal development work; whether the groups use personal development plans for their members internally; and whether the members have reservations about taking part in cross-party training sessions. Below, the research findings in relation to the political groups in the surveyed authorities are examined in depth and compared with the case study information from Liverpool, in order to make recommendations for 'best practice' provision of development for Liverpool's Labour Group.

**5.5.1 Political Groups' Programmes for Member Development** – of the 43 local authorities surveyed in this research, fourteen have a Labour Group with its own internal elected member development programme, just under one-third of them (32.6%). Liverpool Labour Group also set up its own 'Group Development Plan' for 2004-06, in addition to the corporate programme, due to recognition that the group's training needs were not being met by training at the City Council, and because they did not want to discuss some issues with members of other parties, for example, casework practice. The Labour Group's concerns reflect Goss (2001) as discussed in Chapter 2 (at 2.4.4). Goss points out that in an adversarial environment "it is dangerous to admit weakness, and foolhardy to give opponents new weapons". Goss (2001) suggests that learning needs to be made safe "which may mean activity within party groups, or action-learning sets or project teams".

Subsequently the new Council Members' Programme in Liverpool has taken the concerns of the political groups into consideration to an extent. Here members have had 'tutorial' sessions for the 'Learning Support Groups' provided in learning sets based on their political groups. This was to allay fears that discussions of best practice were 'helping the other side', or that party political confidences were being breached. Workshops in the new programme, meanwhile, are still provided at cross-party level, allowing for a balance



in the way the course is delivered to accommodate the need for corporate development and for sensitivity to the groups' concerns.

All five of the members interviewed were pleased with the training that had been undertaken within the Labour Group. The three senior members had been involved to some extent in providing this: Cllr M. with budget briefings to the group; Cllr J. in arranging a Labour women's speaking course; and Cllr M. in training on casework. Two members drew attention to the need for more internal group training. Two members referred specifically to the opportunity such training provides for the group to team-build: Cllr J. said that "anything that strengthens the relationships within the group is a good idea". The Group's development programme was commended in the Labour Party's 'Best Practice in Local Government Awards' in February 2006 (ALC, 2006a).

Although the issue of training prior to election was not raised within the questionnaire to other local authorities, it was an issue to emerge strongly from the interviews with members at Liverpool City Council. Cllr I. requested more training prior to being elected and all five members felt training opportunities within their political party were limited. Both Cllrs V. and I. – the newest members interviewed – drew attention to the inadequacy of their induction training when first elected, despite the group's efforts to provide a mentor for them. In interviews concern was expressed that members do not receive sufficient training before they are elected which is reflected in the literature in Chapter 2 (Martin et al, 1997). Both the two newer councillors said that they felt unprepared for the first weeks of their councillor role: Cllr I. commented that the Council's Chief Executive welcomed them by saying how important they were – making it 'embarrassing to ask for help' subsequently. Two members (Cllrs J. and V.) said they were selected at the last minute before the deadline for nominating candidates – reflecting Wilson and Game's (1994) findings that most members found themselves "projected almost unpreparedly" into council membership.

As discussed in Chapter 2 (2.3.3), some Labour groups are formalising the training they offer to future elected members in a 'Labour Academy' programme (Bristol LP, 2006;

Lancashire LP, 2006). Here training is provided by elected members and others with expertise for those interested in standing for election. Again, funding is of concern with local authorities banned from promoting 'party political activity' under the 1988 Local Government Act. As Wheeler says, however, without 'attracting members of talent' to stand for selection within the parties, there is little incentive for those who are currently members to improve their practice, as there is little competition for their seats (2006). For example, Liverpool Labour Party had only slightly more candidates on its selection panel in 2005-06 than the number of seats where candidates were needed to stand (37 potential candidates, for 30 seats requiring them, 12 of which were won by Labour).

**5.5.2 Political Groups' Budgets for Development and Training** – as discussed at 4.4.2, twelve of the 43 local authorities surveyed said that the political groups received a dedicated training budget from their local authority (30.2%). In Liverpool the political groups are not provided with a development budget from the council to spend on their own development. At times specific needs for the group have been met via the corporate EMD budget, for example, funding was provided for a short course in public speaking and confidence-building for the women in the Labour group in March 2005 because this was not being provided at corporate level.

Other development for the group has had to be funded directly by the group, however, such as the group 'Awaydays'. Funding for this was not granted as it was deemed to be 'party political'. The cost was met from the groups own campaign fund, that is, paid for by the members themselves. As discussed in Chapter 2, Goss (2001) and Clarke and Stewart (1996) point to the need for development of the political groups, as well as within them. Clarke and Stewart say that attention must be paid to development of the members' own organisation, which 'necessarily cannot be done to them' (1996). Goss points to the need for 'group-building' where the needs of the political group are dealt with sensitively, rather than 'team-building in a conventional sense'.

Other local authorities provide training for members in their council roles, for example, the London Borough of Brent runs sessions for opposition members to focus on effective

opposition (IDeA, 2004c). The need for ‘team-building’ the Labour group as an opposition is not currently recognised at Liverpool, although such a role is essential to the democratic process on which local government is based (Leach *et al*, 1994). Other staff and groups of members are funded for ‘team-building’ – including the Executive Management Team and the councillors on the Executive Board. Yet despite evidence that ‘group-building’ is important (Goss, 2001; Clarke & Stewart, 1996) the opposition members themselves have to fund their own development activities due to sensitivity about funding ‘political activity’.

The interview evidence shows that members believe it is the responsibility of the political group, and the leader in particular, to determine members’ learning goals, but the group is not provided with the autonomy to provide opportunities to meet these. Consideration is needed as to how resources for the political groups can be made available for dedicated training, in addition to the provision of a comprehensive training programme for all local authority councillors. There is then a need for some part of the development budget to be devolved to the political groups as the local authority cannot meet all members’ development needs directly due to nature of their roles.

**5.5.3 Personal Development Plans within the Political Groups** – the survey of local authorities at 4.4.3 shows that about one-third of Labour groups have PDP’s for their members within the groups, as well as those which are used in the wider council. Seven Labour groups have their own PDP’s for their members, whilst eight use their council’s PDP’s within the group. Most Labour groups do not then use PDPs for their members (62.8%), including at Liverpool City Council.

As discussed in Chapter 2, the Labour Party’s Standing Orders for groups says that one ‘Labour Group officer’ (that is, an elected member in office within the group) should have a record of their members’ training needs, and meet with the members annually to discuss these needs. It recommends the Chief Whip take on this role, although it could be another officer (LP, 2006). Members of Liverpool Labour Group are asked annually to fill in a form for the Chief Whip but it is not clear how this information is subsequently

utilized in the group, nor is it fed back to the council's corporate development team. The Liverpool City Council members interviewed stated that they see their development within the council being through their group, decided by their leader. The Labour Group members are not trained in appraisal however, reflecting issues raised above about lack of training for managers in appraisal of staff and lack of recognition in managers' own appraisals of their appraisal skills (James, 2005; Bee *et al*, 2003).

The members interviewed commented that their performance in the Labour Group was not assessed but simply that, for example, "I was asked to take on a senior role" (Cllr M.). Members are aware that the group leader is keen for them to take up development opportunities (Cllr I.), but do not believe the leader gives specific direction on this. Officers with management responsibility at Liverpool City Council are offered training in appraisal and performance review, including those in the group offices for their own staff. Members also saw a role for the political group office staff to assist with this in practice (Cllr M.). Leaders and Whips need to be enabled to drive their group's development, and provision made for appraisal of members within the groups.

**5.5.4 Members' Reservations with regard to Cross-party Elected Member Development and the provision of Separate Sessions in the Corporate Programme** – about one-third (34.9%) of respondents in the survey of local authorities said that members at their authority had expressed reservations about cross-party development. Such reservations were expressed by members in Administration groups, as well as those in Opposition groups, showing this is not just an opposition issue. Respondents in the survey also stated that the same number of authorities – fifteen out of 43 – provide separate training sessions for the different political groups on some issues.

As discussed above, separate sessions for the groups were not provided until the new LCMP was launched last year and members' requests for separate learning sets were heeded. In interview one member commented "I am very glad LSGs were agreed to be in party groups" (Cllr J.). Members interviewed were clear that whilst they could work with members of the other groups on some matters – for example, there was positive reference

made to the Liberal Democrat Chair of Children's Services and the scrutiny work undertaken on this committee, many issues could not be shared. In particular Liverpool members were insistent that mentoring could only be meaningfully provided within the members' own parties, and the Labour Group had set up its own mentoring system in 2004. No member interviewed considered cross-party mentoring to be a serious consideration due to political confidentiality – as Cllr J. said “I have good relationships with the Lib Dems but I know where the ‘cut-off’ point is”.

In the interviews undertaken for this research all five of the Liverpool elected members were clear about the limitations of sharing learning experiences between members of the different groups (4.4.4 – 4.4.5). Despite the prevailing impetus for cross-party training of elected members (ODPM, 2003, IDeA, 2006) the members interviewed were at best cautious towards cross-party development, and at times openly hostile to some elements of this. When asked if members felt they could assist colleagues in other political groups, two members asked “why should I”; one said simply “no way”. All three senior members had however, tried to use their expertise to assist in policy-making at the council within their roles as opposition spokespeople, and had their expertise dismissed by the Administration group due to the political priorities of the group. Cllr J. had offered advice on the youth service; Cllr M. on the budget-setting process; Cllr S. on neighbourhood management - all areas where the Administration's delivery is currently criticised.

This raises the paradox for the opposition group who wish to improve the performance of the council to benefit their residents, but who have a concern to ensure the council's political administration is not able to take all the credit for this. For example, members in Liverpool identified how they work to improve the local authority's performance in order to ensure better services for their constituents, whilst at the same time campaigning politically against the council's administration. Cllr M. says of his councillor role “we want to improve the lives of residents, but have to ensure we get the credit – (we have to) push Liverpool City Council to best practice but also criticise the Administration”.

**5.5.5 Summary of 3<sup>rd</sup> Research Objective Conclusions:** *In what ways can development be provided to ensure engagement and a safe learning environment for all councillors?*

Thus the research undertaken to examine the third part of the research question indicates that the reservations highlighted within the literature discussed in Chapter 2 are well-founded in practice. The interview and other case study information from Liverpool demonstrates that corporate, cross-party development opportunities cannot of themselves be fully sufficient to meet members' training needs, however effectively provided, given the complexity of the councillor roles and the importance to elected members of their party. Although the survey information on this part of the research could not be cross-referenced with the councils' performance scores – due to the survey information relating to one political group only in each authority – the survey results do show that the concerns of the Opposition Group in Liverpool are widespread, and are not merely a peculiarity of the situation in Liverpool City Council.

The national census of councillors in England in 2004 showed that only 49.5% of members cite 'political beliefs' as their reason for standing for election, whilst over 83% cite 'to serve the community' as the main motive for standing for election (IDeA, 2004b). However, as Wheeler (2005a) points out, 95% of councillors are representatives of one of the main political parties and these members have an obligation to their group and to their party. Most elected members are members of political groups, and would not be council members otherwise. Without abiding by the party line and rules to an acceptable extent, members will not be entitled to the representation that such group membership brings (for example, nominations for positions on committees). Without the party 'badge' members face an uphill, if not impossible, task to retain their seat at the next election.

The interviews undertaken with members at Liverpool City Council reveal the importance of their party allegiance to the members. Wheeler says that lack of acknowledgement of the extent of political party involvement can lead to lack of openness in debate within local authorities – this is the 'huge elephant' in the room that he says everyone is trying to ignore in discussions on local governance (2005a). Wheeler suggests this lack of debate about the role of political parties reflects the unease that

many government agencies and local councils have with the role of political parties and groups in selecting candidates either as councillors or as cabinet members and leaders. Thus it is “much better to assume that councillors are like the proverbial cod in the North Sea who can be fished out each election by political parties to naturally assume the role of civic leaders” (Wheeler, 2004): like cod, this supply is not inexhaustible, however. Figure 16 (at 5.4.6) showed the role of the political parties in delivering the candidates for election to local authority. Wheeler (2004) shows that councils cannot assume that ‘natural leaders’ will emerge from such a process, and that some parts of some political parties act as ‘gatekeepers’ rather than as ‘talent scouts’ in the provision of members. Wheeler (2004) cites the example of the British army who, following the Charge of the Light Brigade and the First World War, accepted that skilled leaders do not emerge naturally but have to be made. Political groups then need to be supported to be both more effective as ‘talent scouts’ and to support their members development once elected.

The findings of the research from the survey of other authorities and from the Liverpool case study indicate areas for work in Liverpool City Council with the political groups and with the Opposition Group in particular. Four areas were identified within the research where specific work is needed to support the groups. These are:-

- That some learning should take place within the groups, and the local authority needs to overtly support this, so members feel safe in sharing learning experiences to help each other, without feeling they are compromising themselves politically;
- A need to support political groups to seek out new members for election and to assist the members in doing this, which can benefit the local authority in raising the performance and capability of the councillors that then serve on the authority;
- That some of the funding for elected member development from the local authority needs to be devolved to group level for internal team-building activity to strengthen the groups’ internal cohesion; and
- That there is a need for support for members, assisted by political support group officers, to be able to appraise members and drive the development in their group.

Recommendations for supporting members in their groups and developing the groups themselves are in Chapter 6 below.

## **5.6 Conclusions about the Research Question: *How can effective elected member development be provided to enable performance improvement at Liverpool City Council?***

This dissertation has shown that the provision of elected member development relates to performance in local authorities. In particular, the research identified some specific elements of development and ways of delivering these that have a positive relationship with higher levels of local authority performance, indicating more effective means of providing such development. Although it is not proved that such provision leads to improved performance, rather than resulting from it, no evidence was found that increased provision of development had any negative effect on performance.

The research also indicated that the elements of development provision with the most positive relationships to performance were those with which there have been problems in delivery in Liverpool. Issues around officer support, external recognition for the development programme, members' appraisal and use of meaningful personal development plans, and liaison with political group support offices and consultation with members, are all indicated as being important to the delivery of development opportunities. It is then possible that more effective provision in these areas could enable member development at Liverpool City Council to have a positive effect on performance.

Finally, the dissertation asserts that the most effective provision of corporate cross-party member development cannot of itself be fully sufficient to meet the learning needs of all councillors given the complexity of the councillor role and of the democratic process. Issues specific to the learning needs of political groups and the members in them have been shown to be important in providing development effectively, as discussed at 5.5. Further, the political parties need to be supported in recruiting and selecting talented members to serve on local authorities in the first place. It cannot be left only to voluntary organisations to deal with this critical element of the local authority's performance management as the resources of the political parties are very limited, and the work within them undertaken largely by volunteers.



Local councils have a critical role in retaining any new influx of talented councillors and not only for altruistic reasons: the Audit Commission, the Social Services Inspectorate and OFSTED have all “highlighted the importance of political leadership to service delivery” (Wheeler, 2004). Councils thus have to invest in development and member support to find the talented political leaders of the future despite the resources required.

Wheeler suggests that councillors are more trusted than any other group of representatives, including Members of Parliament and local government managers (Wheeler, 2004). Similarly, Clarke and Stewart (1996) refer to the ‘distinctiveness’ of local government and the values which underlie its operation – including its public accountability, relationships with citizens and service users, its multiple functions and its democratic base. Clarke & Stewart say that many councils ignore this in the induction of new staff and in the continuing training and development of staff and elected members, despite evidence that people “both on the inside and outside of local government believe the distinctiveness to be important” (1996). Wheeler states that although championing the role of local people as advocates of their local communities who can provide leadership for complex multi-service organisations, and who are accountable through regular elections, may be “more demanding than dealing with likeminded professionals appointed by the central state”, it does provide both democracy and strength of purpose. “In short it makes local government what it is” (2004).

Liverpool’s politicians face a critical time, and carry much responsibility. The city is bidding for ‘city-region’ status, with its consequences for governance and services; Liverpool is due to be placed on the international stage as the 2008 European Capital of Culture; there are further changes planned in terms of neighbourhood devolution, with its implications for councillor roles and service delivery, and the apparent slide in performance needs to be halted. Effective member development is clearly needed: if development has the potential to improve members’ abilities and capacity this would suggest that all possible measures that can be taken to deliver this need to be acted on. Chapter 6 contains recommendations for development provision and plans for implementation to enable such development to be provided in the most effective way.

## **6. Recommendations: How can effective elected member development be provided to enable performance improvement at Liverpool City Council?**

Chapter 5 of the dissertation analysed the research findings to discover how elected member development can be provided effectively to enable performance improvement at Liverpool City Council. As discussed in Chapter 2, effectively delivered elected member development may have the potential to contribute positively to problems documented with performance at Liverpool, including the apparent deterioration in performance indicated by the CPA score in 2005, and other governance and member capacity issues highlighted as being of concern. Thus it is important that elected members are fully supported to enable them to meet these challenges. Wheeler says that “none of this will come cheap but if we want talented and capable members we have to provide appropriate support and advice for all councillors” (2004). All recommendations are intended to obtain best value from limited public funds, however, many at no additional cost.

As discussed above, the research question was divided into three parts in order to obtain as complete an answer as possible to the main research question. Thus the analysis first examined whether provision of elected member development leads to improved performance in local authorities by cross-referencing the provision with the councils' performance scores. Having established that such provision was a positive indicator of higher levels of performance, the provision of cross-party EMD at Liverpool City Council was examined in detail looking at each element of provision identified in the primary research. Thus in answering the second part of the research question - how members' development needs can be appraised and development opportunities best be provided whilst ensuring public value – several issues were identified where changes can be made. Finally, the third part of the question asked in what ways development can be provided to ensure engagement and a safe learning environment for all councillors, and identified further issues for the individual political groups in addition to the council-wide ones. The recommendations for both cross-party development and individual political group development are thus in two sections below.

## **6.1 Recommendations for Corporate Elected Member Development**

**6.1.1 Liverpool Council Members' Programme** – As identified at 5.4.1, there remain problems at Liverpool City Council with engaging members who are already well-qualified academically and are not motivated by an award at this level, and members who have had no engagement at all with the new course. Since the elections in May it is apparent that a modular course is also not ideal for engaging new members, as the modules running when new members join may not be suitable, although a brief induction course is run in addition. Finally, the actual content of the programme is still under discussion, and there is a lack of specialist knowledge amongst the EMD team. Thus:-

- To help resolve the problems of lack of engagement and motivation it is necessary to have meaningful links to the political leaders and senior group members, and work with them on targeting members' development (at no additional cost);
- To complete the construction of the modular course there is a corporate Learning and Development team at the authority whose expertise could be called upon, and there is much expertise available nationally, such as I&DeA (dependent on cost);
- The University of Chester has already been contracted to provide assistance in terms of accreditation, and the outcome of this needs evaluation in the longer term (at no additional cost to that already spent); and
- To improve the induction for new members external help could be called upon - Paul Wheeler of the Political Skills Council has offered to visit (at no initial cost)

**6.1.2 Provision of Resources** – as identified at 5.4.3, there is a lack of officer support for EMD in Liverpool City Council at present, which needs to be sufficient for the number of members and in particular needs input at a senior level appropriate to the strategic nature of the task. The literature points to the need for resources for EMD to be comparable to those for the senior managers' team. Thus:-

- Officer support should be resourced at the level envisaged when the service was established in terms of number and seniority of officers: PO5 manager, assistant and researcher (this funding was agreed, it should not be additional); and
- The budget can be ring-fenced to ensure officer support can continue to be provided.

**6.1.3 Regional or National Member Development Charter** – although the Liverpool programme is accredited, there is a lack of input from external sources and lack of communication amongst peers, as identified at 5.4.4. As Wheeler says “no one organisation can hope to meet all the development needs of elected members” (2004). Thus:-

- There is a need to sign up to one of the recognised member development charters to ensure Liverpool programme is sufficiently robust, which would also provide connection to EMD in other authorities and enable it to benefit from best practice elsewhere (dependent on cost);
- The LCMP could be extended to other Merseyside councils, for members to share learning with members from neighbouring authorities (this could be income-generating); and
- Funding still needs to be provided for members to attend regional training, at NWE0, where contact with members from other authorities can be made, in addition to provision of the accredited course in Liverpool (some cost involved, but needs to be clearly linked with identified learning needs); and
- Ensure provision for all members to engage in development, including senior members and well-qualified members who can access their own learning, for example to attend conferences where access networks for learning (small cost).

**6.1.4 Appraisal and Training Needs Assessment** – as identified at 5.4.5, there are problems at Liverpool with insufficiently robust identification of learning needs and lack of links to the overall development needs of the political groups. Thus:-

- The officers responsible for assessing members’ needs should be trained in this, as provided by NWE0, and effort targeted onto areas appropriate to corporate development (small cost for training);
- Changes in the way appraisal of members’ training needs is undertaken, and closer working with the political groups on this (no cost); and
- Assistance is needed for the Group Whips or other senior members in undertaking appraisal and goal-setting within the groups (small cost, but performance review training is available within the City Council for officers, which can be accessed).

**6.1.5 Promotion of Elected Member Development** – as identified at 5.4.6 – 5.4.8, there has been a lack of communication and promotion of learning opportunities for members in Liverpool City Council. Thus:-

- Member Development Working Group / Committee - must champion the cause of development for members, and be used for meaningful consultation with members who are committed to feed back to and from their groups (no cost);
- Appoint ‘Members’ Learning and Development Champions’ at suitably senior level for each political group (no cost);
- Political group support offices – ensure communication with group offices who can assist with planning and communicate effectively with members in order to ensure attendance and appropriate targeting of sessions (no additional cost); and
- Create a political culture where personal development is valued and sufficiently prioritised, to help ensure good attendance at sessions (no cost).

## **6.2 Recommendations for Development of the Opposition Group**

One of the stated aims of the research was to make recommendations for the political groups should the evidence show that cross-party development is not sufficient to equip members for their roles. The data for this dissertation was gathered from elected members of Liverpool’s Opposition (Labour) Group, and from Labour Group offices in other local authorities. The findings of the research clearly show a need for political groups to have their own development in addition to members having learning opportunities at a corporate level. Due to the researcher’s professional role providing a support service for the Opposition Group at Liverpool City Council, the set of recommendations below refer in particular to Liverpool Labour Group, however.

**6.2.1. Opposition Group Programme** – as identified at 5.5.1, the members of the Labour group are wary of cross-party development in some circumstances, and of sharing some types of learning experiences with their political rivals. Thus:-

- The corporate programme must continue to make arrangements for some learning should to take place within dedicated group environments, and the local authority

needs to overtly support this, so members feel safe in sharing learning experiences to help their development and their colleagues, without feeling they are compromising themselves politically (almost no additional costs to course); and

- Recognition of the need of group to develop itself – including with group inductions, group appraisals, internal group mentoring and support where appropriate, such as ensuring access for members to be trained in taking on these roles from appropriate sources (may be cost of external training courses).

**6.2.2 Provision of Development Budget for Group** – as identified at 5.5.2, the groups need to be given opportunities for team-building as other workplace teams are, and resources for other issues to be discussed at group level. Thus:-

- Part of the members' training budget to be devolved to the officers in the group offices to spend on internal group development (part of existing budget); and
- This to include resources for an annual group 'Awayday' to be held for team-building to strengthen the groups' internal cohesion (part of existing budget).

**6.2.3 Set up a 'Liverpool Academy'** – as identified at 5.5.1, the research undertaken clearly shows that developing members only once they are elected severely restricts opportunities to manage the performance of members, and hence of the local authority, and the political groups. The literature points to the need for political parties to recruit and select more diverse and talented candidates given that they are responsible for the recruitment of members for elections. Thus:-

- There is a need for the Opposition Group as the leaders of the local Labour Party to lead on setting up a training programme for potential candidates in order to 'attract members of talent' to stand in local elections;
- Current input to the development of candidates already provided at Labour Group meetings can be built on and extended by the group and formalised into a training programme, including the mentoring of candidates by members; and
- Active encouragement of inclusivity and diversity by members to ensure younger candidates and more women and black members are enabled to participate in local electoral process (this to be funded by political party or opposition group)

### **6.3 Recommendations for Future Research on Elected Member Development and Improving Local Authority Performance**

The research undertaken for this dissertation is looks specifically at the means of delivery of elected member development in local authorities, and makes recommendations for more effective provision of this at Liverpool City Council, in order to improve performance there. There are many related areas that could benefit from in-depth investigation, in order that other issues relating to elected member development can be explored in order to lead to improved practice, however. Below, some of these are suggested, although the list is of course not exhaustive. Thus:-

- **Gather Data from other Political Groups** – further research needs to be undertaken to compare the situation in other political groups as all the data in this study was gathered from Labour groups. It was not, however, gathered from only Labour Groups in opposition, but from those in all positions on local authorities. Different political groups may have different priorities or perspectives in terms of their development needs.
- **Extend Research to all Local Authorities** – it would be possible to gather comparative survey information from all the councils in the country as there are 389 councils in England. Given sufficient time and resources all could be surveyed and statistically significant results gathered.
- **Examine the Corporate Assessment of the Local Authorities** – again, given further time and resources, development could be more closely compared with the corporate governance in local authorities, rather than the more general Comprehensive Performance Assessments used in this study. This would give more specific information on member development and governance of councils.
- **The Role of Political Leaders** – is currently a major issue for research, and there is a need for specific examination of the development needs of political leaders and future leaders.
- **Content of EMD Courses** – this study has concentrated on the delivery of learning and development opportunities to elected members. There is a need for further work on the content of EMD, particularly with regard to changing roles.

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## Questionnaire to all LPAN Members Elected Member Development and Training

### Part I: Your Local Authority

1) Name of local authority: .....

2) Who is in Administration in your local authority? Please tick box if applicable:

Labour		Conservative		Lib Dem	
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Other – please state:.....

3) What was your authority's CPA Assessment score in 2005? Please tick 1 box only:

0 stars		1 star		2 stars	
3 stars		4 stars		Not known	

4) Does your local authority have a specific budget for elected member development and training? Please tick one box only:

Yes		No	
Do not know			

5) Does your authority have a corporate (cross-party) elected member training / development programme? Please tick 1 box only:

Yes		No	
Do not know			

6) Are there any dedicated officers employed in your authority to provide the elected member training and development? Please tick 1 box only:

Yes		No	
Do not know			

**6a)** If yes, please state number of officers employed to provide corporate member development and training in your authority:

Number of officers in LA employed for corporate member development	
Do not know number of officers	

**6b)** What grade / salary is / are the member development officer(s) employed at:

Grade(s) of member development officer(s)	
Do not know grades / salary	

**7)** Is the member training and development at your authority accredited by any external body, eg a university? Please tick 1 box only:

Yes		No	
Do not know			

**7a)** If yes, please state which body provides this accreditation if known:

.....

**8)** Is your local authority signed up to the IDeA Charter for Member Development? Please tick 1 box only:

Yes		No	
Do not know			

**9)** Is your local authority signed up to your regional Employers' Organisation Charter for Member Development? Please tick 1 box only:

Yes		No	
Do not know			

**10)** Do all elected members have a personal development plan (PDP) drawn up by the local authority? Please tick 1 box only:

All have a PDP – it is compulsory	
All have a PDP – it is optional	
Some have a PDP - it is optional	
None have a PDP	
Do not know	

## **Part II: Your Labour Group**

**11) What is the position of the Labour Group on your local authority? Please tick 1 box if applicable:**

Administration		Opposition		Minority group	
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Other, please state:.....

**11a) How many members are there in your Labour Group?.....**

**12) Does your Labour Group have its own programme for member development / training for its members? Please tick 1 box only:**

Yes		No	
Do not know			

**13) Are Labour Group members compelled in any way to attend training / development sessions? Please tick all applicable boxes:**

Yes – those sessions held by the Group	
Yes – sessions held by the local authority	
No - there is no compulsory attendance	

**13a) If yes, please state in what way the sessions are compulsory? Eg is there a whip on such sessions?.....**

**14) If training / development sessions are not compulsory, are Labour group members encouraged to attend training / development sessions? Please tick all applicable boxes:**

Yes – those sessions held by the group	
Yes – those held by the local authority	
No - there is no compulsory attendance	

**14a) If yes, please state in what ways members are encouraged to attend? Eg is there an attendance allowance for sessions?.....**

**15) Does the Labour Group have a dedicated budget from your local authority for development and training - eg Awaydays – for Labour Group members? Please tick one box only:**

Yes		No	
Do not know			

**16)** Do all Labour members have a personal development plan drawn up by the Labour Group? Please tick 1 box only:

Yes - all have a PDP drawn up within group	
Yes - some have a PDP – it is optional	
No - but group use the PDP drawn up by the authority	
None have a PDP within group	
Do not know	

**Part III: Political Groups and member development and training**

**17)** Is there a member development committee or working group at your authority where members of all parties are represented?

Yes		No	
Do not know			

**18)** Are political group office staff – eg the political assistants - involved in / consulted on the provision of cross-party elected member development?

Yes		No	
Do not know			

**19)** Do members in your group / at your authority express any reservations about sharing learning experiences with members of other political groups?

Yes		No	
Do not know			

**19a)** Would any member of your Labour Group be willing to be contacted about this matter for interview? If possible, please give contact details:

.....

**20)** Does your local authority make special arrangements for the needs of the political groups within its corporate development programme? Eg hold separate sessions of some aspects of training for the different groups?

Yes		No	
Do not know			

**20a)** Please give any details if known or indicate that you are willing to be contacted further about this for interview:.....

**Please return this questionnaire by post (addressed envelope enclosed) to:-**

Laura Collins

---

**OR email to:-**

---

**< Thank you very much for your time >**

**Any problems please ring Laura:-**

**Office:**

**Mobile:**



## Total Questionnaire Responses

### Elected Member Development and Training

#### **Part I: Your Local Authority**

**1) Name of local authority: ...43:-**

5 cities; 15 MBCs; 11 counties; 12 London boroughs

**2) Who is in Administration in your local authority? Please tick box if applicable:**

Labour	14 -inc 2 labour mayors	Conservative	18	Lib Dem	3
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Other – please state: 8:-

4 non-Labour coalitions/hung; 2 joint Labour / Lib Dem admin; 1 ind mayor/ cross cabinet; 1 Plaid Cymru

**3) What was your authority's CPA Assessment score in 2005? Please tick 1 box only: (5 = 2004 – 3 excellent; 2 good)**

0 stars	1	1 star	1	2 stars	8
3 stars	17 (+2)	4 stars	10 (+3)	Not known	1

**4) Does your local authority have a specific budget for elected member development and training? Please tick one box only:**

Yes	41	No	1 Norfolk
Do not know	1		

**5) Does your authority have a corporate (cross-party) elected member training / development programme? Please tick 1 box only:**

Yes	41	No	1 Westminster
Do not know	1		

**6) Are there any dedicated officers employed in your authority to provide the elected member training and development? Please tick 1 box only:**

Yes	22 (incs 3 = part-time)	No	20 (incs 4 = part of other posts)
Do not know	1		

**6a) If yes, please state number of officers employed to provide corporate member development and training in your authority:**

Number of officers in LA employed for corporate member development	3 < 1 12 = 1 3 = 1- 2 3 = 3
Do not know number of officers	1

**6b) What grade / salary is / are the member development officer(s) employed at:**

Grade(s) of member development officer(s)	5 = PO 2/3/4/5 , & 3 others stated
Do not know grades / salary	14

**7) Is the member training and development at your authority accredited by any external body, eg a university? Please tick 1 box only:**

Yes	7 stated	No	32
Do not know	4		

**7a) If yes, please state which body provides this accreditation if known:**  
 Links - Leeds City – CIPD / Stoke City - INLOGOV / Nottinghamshire County - Warwick University; also Lancs / Medway/ Kettering/ Calderdale?

**8) Is your local authority signed up to the IDeA Charter for Member Development? And / or -**

**9) Is your local authority signed up to your regional Employers' Organisation Charter for Member Development?**

Please tick 1 box only:

Yes	28	No	8 (incs 4 trying)
Do not know	7		

(Answers combined subsequently as Charters combined in some regions)

**10) Do all elected members have a personal development plan (PDP) drawn up by the local authority? Please tick 1 box only:**

All have a PDP – it is compulsory	5
All have a PDP – it is optional	7
Some have a PDP - it is optional	13 (incs 1 = nearly all)
None have a PDP	17 (incs 3 = trying)
Do not know	1

## **Part II: Your Labour Group**

**11) What is the position of the Labour Group on your local authority? Please tick 1 box if applicable:**

Administration	15 (17*) – incs shared cabinet with ind mayor; & 2 labour mayors	Opposition	20	Minority group	6
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Other, please state:- Also - 2 shared Labour admin with Lib Dems\* .....

**11a) How many members are there in your Labour Group?**

Average = in Administration = 37.8;

Average in Opposition = 17.6;

Average in minority groups = 9.7

**12) Does your Labour Group have its own programme for member development / training for its members? Please tick 1 box only:**

Yes	14	No	27
Do not know	2		

**13) Are Labour Group members compelled in any way to attend training / development sessions? Please tick all applicable boxes:**

Yes – those sessions held by the Group	2
Yes – sessions held by the local authority	6
No - there is no compulsory attendance	34

**13a)** If yes, please state in what way the sessions are compulsory? Eg is there a whip on such sessions?.....Legal obligation planning etc;  
 general - Whip – and pressure .....Northampton MBC - Whip – target set at 80% attendance by ODPM

**14)** If training / development sessions are not compulsory, are Labour group members encouraged to attend training / development sessions? Please tick all applicable boxes:

Yes – those sessions held by the group	26
Yes – those held by the local authority	32
No - there is compulsory attendance	1 – Northampton

**14a)** If yes, please state in what ways members are encouraged to attend? Eg is there an attendance allowance for sessions?

2 allowances= Lancashire County & Middlesbrough MBC;

16 = reminders/pressure from office/ peers / whip;

Shropshire – points & publicity

LB Westminster – held prior to council meetings

**15)** Does the Labour Group have a dedicated budget from your local authority for development and training - eg Awaydays – for Labour Group members? Please tick one box only:

Yes	13	No	26 (inc 1 = trying)
Do not know	4		

**16)** Do all Labour members have a personal development plan drawn up by the Labour Group? Please tick 1 box only:

Yes - all have a PDP drawn up within group	2
Yes - some have a PDP – it is optional	5
No - but group use the PDP drawn up by the authority	8
None have a PDP within group	27
Do not know	1

### **Part III: Political Groups and member development and training**

**17)** Is there a member development committee or working group at your authority where members of all parties are represented?

Yes	24	No	16
Do not know	3		

**18)** Are political group office staff – eg the political assistants - involved in / consulted on the provision of cross-party elected member development?

Yes	23	No	20
Do not know			

**19)** Do members in your group / at your authority express any reservations about sharing learning experiences with members of other political groups?

Yes	15 (more in admin groups)	No	24
Do not know	4		

**19a)** Would any member of your Labour Group be willing to be contacted about this matter for interview? If possible, please give contact details:

.....

**20)** Does your local authority make special arrangements for the needs of the political groups within its corporate development programme? Eg hold separate sessions of some aspects of training for the different groups?

Yes	15	No	22
Do not know	6		

**20a)** Please give any details if known or indicate that you are willing to be contacted further about this for interview:...

## **Questions for Semi-structured Interviews with Elected Members**

### **Part 1 - Assessing needs for training and development**

- 1) Since being selected to stand as a Labour councillor, have you been asked what training opportunities you require and if so when, and has this since been updated? How often? :-
  - i. By the Labour Party? By who?
  - ii. By the Labour Group- by Leader/ Whip?
  - iii. By the city council – by member devt officer? Any other?
- 2) Staff at LCC have to have a Personal Development Plan drawn up with their manager each year and this is tied to the plans of the team and service for whom they work. How do you think members could have development goals set and by whom – the Group leader? Council officers?
- 3) Do you as an individual councillor have a clear idea of how your work contributes to –
  - i. The City Council?
  - ii. The Labour Group?
  - iii. The Labour Party?
  - iv. Your constituents?
  - v. The wider community?

## **Part 2 – Experience of training & development**

4) Are you happy with the quality and quantity of training that you are & have been offered in your role as an elected member from:-

i) The City Council (undertaken with members of all parties)?

ii) From / with the Labour Group only at the City Council (eg Awayday, Womens' course)?

iii) From the Labour Party – outside of the council- before / since you were elected?

5) Either - You are registered on the Liverpool Councillorship programme – have you found this helpful to you?

OR You are not registered on the Liverpool Councillorship programme – is there any particular reason for this?

a) Do you understand how the programme is constructed overall – eg that there are 8 modules – 4 basic / 4 advanced? Do you want more info on this?

b) Is the fact that this course is accredited effect you view of it?

6) Do you think that the Councillorship programme could be helpful to:-

i) the Labour Group overall – ie helping each other by working in Learning Support Groups?

ii) Do you think that the Councillorship programme could be helpful to the City Council overall – ie helping to improve governance and thus performance of council?

iii) Do you think it could be helpful to your constituents / community?  
How?

### **Part 3 – Setting up training and development at LCC**

7) Do you feel elected members are consulted on what training is provided for them at LCC?

8) Do you know of the Member Development Working Group at LCC, and who represents the Labour Group on this?

9) Do you think the Labour Group could do more to assess members needs, or do you think this should be in consultation with corporate officers only?

10) Do you have other ideas of how you can better be assisted to improve your working practice and can you say HOW?

11) Do you feel you can assist your colleagues in your group with their development?

a) Your colleagues in other parties?

12) The Labour group set up a mentoring system in 2004 – do you were a mentor / mentee – did you find the experience of this useful in any way?

a) Do you have any ideas how it could be improved for next new members?

b) Do you think it should be extended outside group – mentoring / being mentored by members in other groups / or by officers?



**Table 1: Summary of Interview Data**

<b>Subject / First Elected</b>	<b>Cllr V / 2004</b>	<b>Cllr S / 1998</b>	<b>Cllr M / 1998</b>	<b>Cllr I / 2004</b>	<b>Cllr J / 2002</b>
<b>Role in Group</b>	<b>Backbencher</b>	<b>Spokesperson</b>	<b>Spokesperson</b>	<b>Backbencher</b>	<b>Spokesperson</b>
<b>Interview date</b>	<b>30-03-06</b>	<b>30-03-06</b>	<b>05-04-06</b>	<b>11-04-06</b>	<b>11-04-06</b>
<b>PART I. Assessing Training &amp; Development Needs</b>					
1a) Have you had an assessment of your training needs by your political party?	No, – I was selected to stand for election at last minute	Not that can remember	Do not recall any	Asked when selected – but cannot remember details	None – asked to stand (for election) at last minute
1b) Have you had an assessment of your needs by your political group?	Not asked – but did try and find out from colleagues how to access training	No not asked	Not assessed – just asked if willing to take on senior role	As a group, but not individually	No formal assessment in group – accessed informal mentoring
1c) Have you had an assessment of your needs by the council's corporate EMD officer?	Yes - when 1 <sup>st</sup> elected	Forms sent out, but not interviewed	Self-declaration only, not assessment. But plenty of training sessions offered to all	Asked by Member Development Officer when 1 <sup>st</sup> elected; receive lists of sessions	Have had forms from LCC Member Development Officer
2) Personal Development Plans – how do you think members should have their development goals set and by whom?	The political group. There is a role for LCC corporate officers also	Leader or other senior group member, and mentor – all should have a mentor	Group leader responsible, but carried out by officer in group office in practice	Leader of group – should recognize strengths / weaknesses	Some party political issues dealt with by leader/ his nominee. Others could be dealt with by corporate LCC officers
3a) Do you have a clear idea how your work contributes to Liverpool City Council?	No, not really	Yes – have input at strategic level – discuss work with members / officers and residents	Yes ‘ keep administration on its toes’ – opposition role to scrutinize, in partic. I look at finance issues	Yes – seek to change LCC policy & practices by motions / questions & use of media	Yes – feed ward issues through at strategic level where appropriate, via spokesperson & / or relevant officer
3b) Do you have a clear idea how your work contributes to your political group?	Not very clear	Yes – discuss my input with leader, with (shadow) executive board and group office staff	Yes - leadership role in group esp. expertise on budget issues; & ‘questioning’ role within group	Yes – represent group to outside world	Yes use examples to show how policies working on ground or not, & barriers to their implementation

Appendix 4

<b>Subject / First Elected</b>	<b>Cllr V / 2004</b>	<b>Cllr S / 1998</b>	<b>Cllr M / 1998</b>	<b>Cllr I / 2004</b>	<b>Cllr J / 2002</b>
3c) Do you have a clear idea how your work contributes to your political party?	Yes - I am a representative of the Labour Party	Yes – discuss input with party colleagues at ward and constituency levels	Yes - but this is limited to ward level now, in past had wider role	Yes- represent party	Yes - feed things through party inc. to ministerial level. Also link with people city-wide on issues to show how LP could make a difference eg on SEN issue
3d) Do you have a clear idea how your work contributes to your constituents?	Yes - to be good value for money & reliable	Yes – frequent discussions with neighbourhood officers and other partners, eg police	Yes – members are ‘eyes & ears’ of council in ward – facilitate action where needed	Yes – remit is to help people in ward and campaign for them	Yes - try to support residents in ward & build good relations through surgeries – accessibility is key in my ward
3e) Do you have a clear idea how your work contributes to the wider community?	Yes- I try to be part of it – approachable & likeable	Yes - reflect on progress made with work in area, and report on it to residents	Yes – work for residents, & help neighbourhood officers provide a service for them	Yes – as above	Feed information both from LP to community and vice versa. Have to have sensitivity to low literacy; low self-esteem, & social exclusion in ward
<b>PART II. Experience of Training and Development</b>					
4a) Are you happy with quantity and quality of training offered by the City Council?	It is not sufficient for new members when first elected	I am not interested in corporate training	IT training was good – but no time for any other due to paid work and to family commitments	It is “so-so” - but already late by time you are elected, & some induction stuff is much too ‘dry’ - eg governance session	No – it is not focused enough – are already good publications in the council eg the scrutiny guide – why are these not used in training?
4b) Are you happy with quantity and quality of training offered by your political group?	Has been useful – it has provided opportunities for members to work together	I am involved in providing this – I participate in development of group	Good, but need more in quantity – make more use of group mid-cycle meetings?	Yes – but should do much more as candidate - & new members need a tour (of building) and introductions to staff when first elected	Yes – anything that strengthens the relationships within the group is a good idea

Appendix 4

<b>Subject / First Elected</b>	<b>Cllr V / 2004</b>	<b>Cllr S / 1998</b>	<b>Cllr M / 1998</b>	<b>Cllr I / 2004</b>	<b>Cllr J / 2002</b>
4c) Are you happy with the quantity and quality of training offered by your political party?	None received	Not really offered – I attend conferences. There should be regional events for councillors and candidates	Not much offered except campaigns, & presentations of government policy – but not discussion of it	Not offered much – see above	Not offered much – eg none on ‘Every Child Matters’ – but I attend conferences and make my own support networks
5a) Are you registered on the “Liverpool Council Members’ Programme” course & have you found this helpful? If you are not registered – is there a reason why not?	Yes am registered & it is useful – I have an understanding tutor which is good	Yes am registered as it is an opportunity to help other members of the group, but I am not interested in qualification for myself	No, I am not registered due to lack of time – I have paid work, a home and family, and my other councillor duties to fit in	Sessions are helpful but having to find the time for the written work is stressful if your role as a councillor already very demanding, eg as a member in a deprived ward	Registered but frustrated by it – ‘sledgehammer to crack a nut’ – too much time required & I am under too much other pressure as a councillor. Do not have 2 – 3 hours to sit in a workshop
5b) Do you have an understanding of the structure of the “LCM Programme; eg that it contains eight modules, 4 advanced level?	No – it is better not to know how much there is! I am determined to finish the 1 <sup>st</sup> module	Vaguely – I do not want any more information – councillors already have far too much information sent for them to deal with	No not really – could some elements of it be taught in group meetings, to save members’ time?	Yes – I understand this	Yes – but tutor lost my trust before course started (due to comments on comprehensive education & prostitution at Labour Group meeting)
5c) Is your view of the LCMP course affected by the fact that it is accredited?	This does not affect my view one way or other	This does not affect my view	Yes - as this gives it status	Not really, I have not got formal qualifications as had to leave school at age 15	Yes it is a good idea
6a) Do you think the LCMP course could be helpful to your political group?	Yes – LSG tutorial (module 1) very helpful as work together	Yes	Yes potentially – but need training specific to Labour Group also	Yes – exchange information amongst group, and identify learning gaps	Yes, probably – I am very glad LSGs were agreed to be in party groups
6b) Do you think the LCMP can help the council – eg by improving governance, & thus improve performance?	Possibly	Theoretically, but doubt it will in practice	Bit idealistic – politics will get in way – eg Administration was told best practice re: budget - but still ignored this!	Yes – must have some positive effect if people learning new procedures	Probably – at moment officers are running the city; some prefer that members stay ignorant & they only give minimal information

## Appendix 4

<b>Subject / First Elected</b>	<b>Cllr V / 2004</b>	<b>Cllr S / 1998</b>	<b>Cllr M / 1998</b>	<b>Cllr I / 2004</b>	<b>Cllr J / 2002</b>
6c) Do you think the LCMP course could help your constituents?	Yes – I look at things differently and am questioning things	Theoretically – if it improves members' performance	Possibly – though resources are more important for this. It cannot have a negative effect though	Yes – if councillors learn and it increases their capacity	Yes - if it can encourage community activists to stand for election and become councillors in the future
<b>PART III. Setting up Training and Development at LCC</b>					
7) Do you feel elected members are consulted on the training provided at the city council?	No, not consulted	Vaguely -through political group support office – need individual interviews and consultation as group	Yes - we are asked	No, not as individual. Group is pushed by leader to take up training opportunities provided though	No, not involved but receive plenty of information. We are low on 'ladder of participation'
8) Do you know what the Member Development Working Group is, & who on it represents your political group?	No - do not know who represents group on this	Yes – chief whip	No – did not know there was a Member Development Working Group	Yes – chief whip. Consultation should be a 'two-way street'	Yes - had forgotten – but it is Whip and Chair
9) Do you think your political group could do more to assess members' needs, or should council corporate officers do this?	More by Labour Group	Yes – is job of group – some information needs to remain within group	Yes – should done by be leader and political group office staff, not council corporate staff	Group to do more when 1 <sup>st</sup> elected – Leader did carry out one-to ones, but was a year after my election	Should do more in group – eg post-meeting analysis to identify strategies for future meetings
10) Do you have any other ideas of how you can be better assisted to improve your practice and can you say how?	I need more help with understanding my role – see 4a	By taking opportunities to reflect. I also need more support staff, eg a personal assistant	Casework files need to be fully accessible by group office support staff on my behalf to help my work for residents	I have learned a lot through my LSG – but I still have a problem with speaking in the Council chamber – I have to accept it is not my strength	Have been assisted by Chair of my Select Committee (from Lib Dem group) on carrying out scrutiny process - as she is genuinely committed to this

Appendix 4

<b>Subject / First Elected</b>	<b>Cllr V / 2004</b>	<b>Cllr S / 1998</b>	<b>Cllr M / 1998</b>	<b>Cllr I / 2004</b>	<b>Cllr J / 2002</b>
11a) Do you feel you can assist your colleagues in your group with their development?	I would know where to advise colleagues to go for help	Yes – I have role in this - as above - 5a	Yes I already do this – especially with budget briefings	Yes, on areas I have expertise in – eg youth service – I support our Spokesperson on this subject	I have tried to help all my Labour colleagues on my Select Committee and encouraged their participation
11b) Do you feel you can assist your colleagues in other political groups?	I would share some learning - but have to be careful	Why should I? I have tried – eg Neighbourhood Chairs and on Regeneration Select Committee Admin (Lib Dem) members not interested in good practice, only in their political agenda	Why should I? Are competing within the organisation – we want to improve lives of residents, but have to ensure we get credit - push LCC to best practice but also criticise Administration	No way....	Have tried raising issues very clearly with Lib Dem members on my select committee – if they carry on with policy I have tried my best to point out the problems to them – this does help politically later
12a) Labour Group Mentoring System was set up in 2004 – were you part of this system, and if so how useful do you think it was?	I was mentored– but this was hampered by lack of time of mentor	It has possibilities	Not been a mentor, but willing to be one in future	Was mentored but not ideal – you need a mentor you will see / work with in daily course of your work. I am willing to be a mentor in future	I was a mentor - but my mentee did not respond to offers of help. But I do perform a mentoring role with my Labour colleagues on my select committee
12b) Do you have ideas for improvement of mentoring scheme?	Specific times for meetings must be set to meet - especially in the first few weeks after the election	Have group activities – ie a ‘mentoring sub-group’ should meet – all mentors & mentees could meet for discussion of issues	Mentors need to devote time and effort to it	More information on council procedures as soon as elected – CEX put us under much pressure at induction – said how important we were but this makes it embarrassing to ask for help	Needs commitment from both sides – this could be specified. Give mentees option to change mentor if not working. Also, use the expertise there is in the group for informal mentoring
12c) Do you think there is a role for mentoring outside of your group – eg with other groups or with officers?	Not really with members of other groups. But a positive relationship with them can help us perform scrutiny better	No – this cannot have any meaningful application in the context of Liverpool City Council	No! Not with members in other groups	No not with members of other groups – some information must remain confidential from your political opponents	No – I have good relationships with Lib Dems but I know where the ‘cut-off’ point is; & I do not make deals with them

**Eight EMD Elements cross-referenced by CPA score – Local Authorities with 4 Stars**

<b>Element of EMD</b>	<b>EMD Programme</b>	<b>EMD Budget</b>	<b>EMD Officers Number / Grade</b>	<b>Recognition / Accreditation</b>	<b>Have PDPs</b>	<b>Cross-party Work Group</b>	<b>Political Group Office Staff</b>	<b>Comp / encourage attendance</b>
<b>4 * LAs: Totals</b>	<b>12/13</b>	<b>12/12</b>	<b>8/12</b>	<b>8/10</b>	<b>10/13</b>	<b>7/12</b>	<b>9/13</b>	<b>4/13</b>
Lancs County	Y	Y	3 / DK	Y	ALL	Y	Y	Y
Leeds City	Y	Y	1 / PO3	Y	SOME	Y	Y	X
Chester City	Y	Y	1.5 / DK	Y	ALL	Y	Y	X
Essex County	Y	Y	DK/DK	DK	SOME	X	Y	X
Stockport MBC	Y	Y	1 / DK	DK	ALL	DK	X	X
Kent County	Y	Y	X / X	DK	SOME	X	Y	X
Nottingham's County	Y	Y	X / X	Y	SOME	Y	Y	X
Sheffield City	Y	Y	1 / PO2	X	X	Y	Y	X
LB Westminster	X	Y	X / X	Y	X	X	X	Y
LB Bexley	Y	Y	X / X	Y	SOME	Y	Y	X
Middlesboro' MBC	Y	DK	Y / DK	Y	ALL	X	X	Y
Shropshire County	Y	Y	0.5 / DK	Y	SOME	Y	X	Y
Basingstoke & Deane MBC	Y	Y	1 / DK	X	X	X	Y	X

**Next page – Eight EMD Elements cross-referenced by CPA score – Local Authorities with 3 Stars**

## Appendix 5

<b>Element of EMD</b>	<b>EMD Programme</b>	<b>EMD Budget</b>	<b>EMD officers Number / Grade</b>	<b>Recognition / Accreditation</b>	<b>Have PDPs</b>	<b>Cross-party Working Group</b>	<b>Political Group Office Staff</b>	<b>Compulsory / encourage attendance</b>
<b>3 * LAs: totals</b>	<b>19/19</b>	<b>18/19</b>	<b>12/19</b>	<b>14/18</b>	<b>11/19</b>	<b>10/19</b>	<b>9/19</b>	<b>1/19</b>
Warwick County	Y	Y	X / X	X	X	X	Y	X
Kingston MBC	Y	Y	X / X	Y	SOME	Y	X	X
Norfolk County	Y	X	X / X	X	X	Y	Y	X
Calderdale MBC	Y	Y	1 / PO3	Y	SOME	Y	Y	X
Medway MBC	Y	Y	3 / DK	Y	X	X	X	X
NorthYorks County	Y	Y	X / X	X	X	Y	X	X
LB Islington	Y	Y	X / X	Y	X	X	Y	X
LB Ealing	Y	Y	X / X	Y	ALL	Y	Y	X
LB Newham	Y	Y	3.5 / X	Y	SOME	X	X	X
LB Haringey	Y	Y	2 / DK	Y	SOME	Y	Y	X
Wolves City	Y	Y	1 / PO	DK	ALL	X	X	X
LB Tower Hamlets	Y	Y	1 / DK	Y	ALL	Y	Y	X
LB Houslow	Y	Y	1 / DK	Y	X	X	X	Y
LB Brent	Y	Y	1 / PO5	Y	ALL	X	Y	X
Bracknell Forest BC	Y	Y	1 / DK	Y	SOME	Y	X	X
Kirklees MBC	Y	Y	1 / PO4	Y	ALL	X	Y	X
Oxfords County	Y	Y	0.75/DK	Y	X	Y	X	X
Dacorum MBC	Y	Y	1 / DK	Y	ALL	X	X	X
Bedford MBC	Y	Y	X / DK	X	X	Y	X	X

**Eight EMD Elements cross-referenced by CPA score – Local Authorities with 0 -2 stars**

<b>Element of EMD</b>	<b>EMD Programme</b>	<b>EMD Budget</b>	<b>EMD Officers Number / Grade</b>	<b>Recognition / Accreditation</b>	<b>Have PDPs</b>	<b>Cross-party Working Group</b>	<b>Political Group Office Staff</b>	<b>Comp / encoura attendan</b>
<b>2 / 1 / 0* LAs: Totals</b>	<b>9/9</b>	<b>10/10</b>	<b>2/10</b>	<b>7/9</b>	<b>4/9</b>	<b>6/9</b>	<b>4/10</b>	<b>2/9</b>
Kettering MBC	Y	Y	X/X	Y	X	Y	X	X
Thurrock MBC	Y	Y	X/X	Y	SOME	DK	X	X
Stoke City	Y	Y	X/X	Y	SOME	Y	X	X
Swindon MBC	DK	Y	1/DK	Y	ALL	X	Y	X
LB Lambeth	Y	Y	2/DK	Y	DK	Y	Y	X
LB Harrow	Y	Y	X/X	Y	X	Y	X	Y
Northampton County	Y	Y	X/X	DK	X	X	Y	X
LB Barnet	Y	Y	X/X	X	X	X	X	X
Cumbria County	Y	Y	X/X	X	SOME	Y	Y	X
Northampton MBC	Y	Y	X/X	Y	X	Y	X	Y